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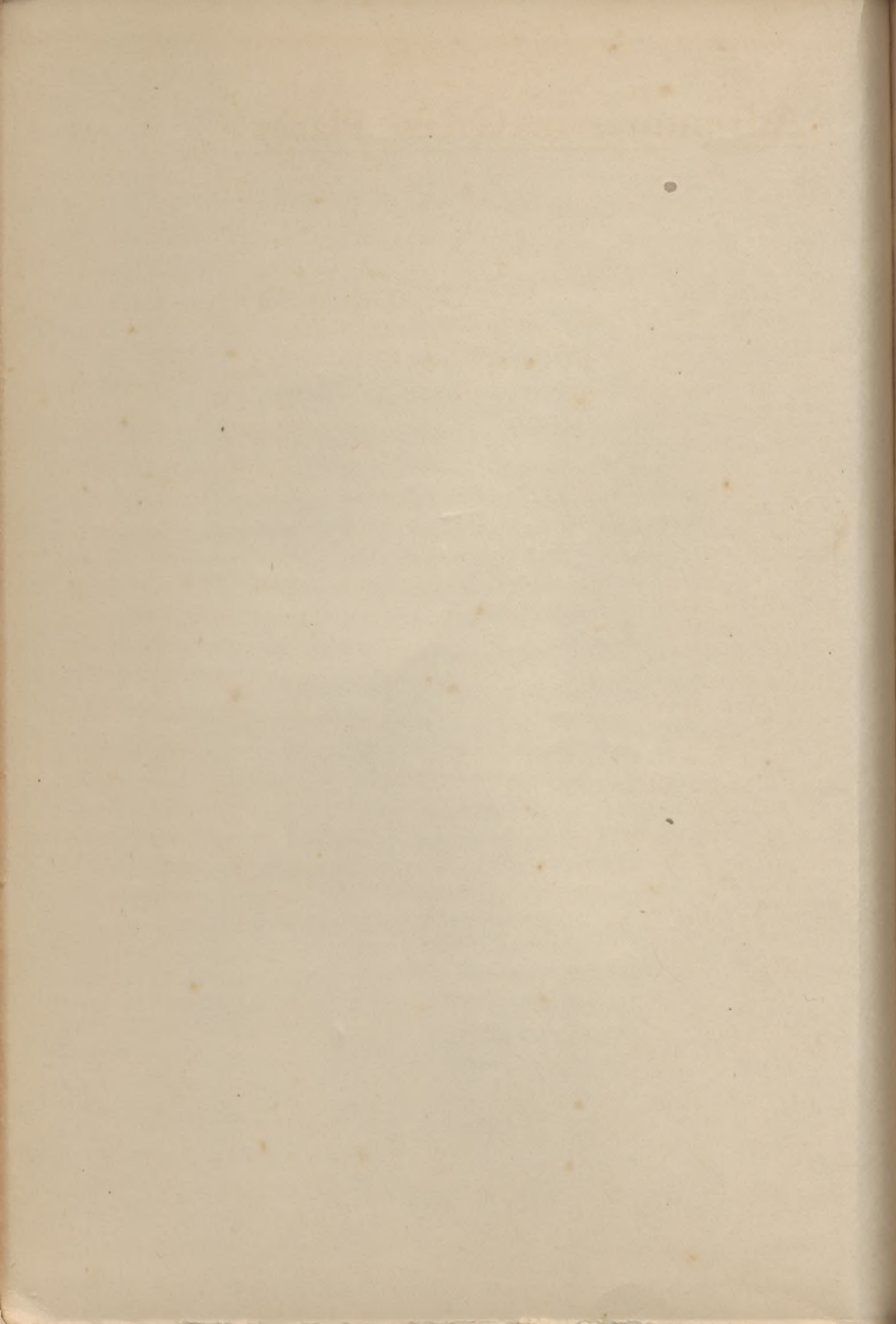
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Adventures in Green Places

By Herbert Ravenel Sass

THE WAY OF THE WILD
ADVENTURES IN GREEN PLACES

ADVENTURES IN GREEN PLACES

BY
HERBERT RAVENEL SASS



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ALPHABETICAL INDEX

The index is divided into two parts, the first containing the names of the authors and the second containing the names of the subjects. The names of the authors are arranged in alphabetical order, and the names of the subjects are arranged in alphabetical order. The index is intended to be used as a guide to the contents of the volume, and to facilitate the search for information.

Adventures in Green Places

Annals of the

ADVENTURES IN GREEN PLACES

ENCHANTED WATERS

HERE and there, in the region where I live, one comes upon little enchanted lagoons. Some of them are open pools embosomed in the woods and are bathed in sunlight for the greater part of each day; and on bright spring and summer mornings all the inhabitants of the waters who are lovers of heat and of light gather at the surface of these secluded lakes to bask in the sun's rays. In other cases the lagoon is itself a part of the forest. On every hand the tall, smooth, columnar trunks of cypresses tower upward from the still water, which is clear brown, like wine, and free from aquatic growths, so that one may paddle for a mile or perhaps for several miles in and out amid the trees.

These are the most beautiful of the lagoons. Overhead the feathery cypress foliage makes a roof that shuts out much of the light; and everywhere, high and low, on living boughs and on dead stubs and branches under them, swing the long banners of the Spanish moss—a gray, ghostly witchery clothing

the trees and covering their gay greenness from view, as though it were wanton to wear bright colors in so sacred a place.

A little cove of a lagoon which we found one spring morning not long ago was a combination of these two types. The lower part of it was open and sunny, and a carpet of vivid green duckweed, broken here and there by round or oblong clear spaces, covered its surface; but farther away, toward the upper reaches of the cove, the moss-bannered cypresses came down into the water, which extended dark and clean for an indeterminate distance into the forest. For a time we stood on the bank and watched the sun-worshippers in and about the open water before us—black, shiny terrapins as large as dinner plates or larger; huge, mottled bullfrogs, singers of wonderful evening choruses; myriads of small fishes of several kinds and shapes, apparently delighting in the warmth. None of these moved. But at frequent intervals swift shadows slid across the sunny face of the pool as night herons and Louisiana herons swept silently overhead; while around the margins, where the carpet of water growths was solid and thick close to the shore, troops of gallinules walked with quick steps, conversing with one another ceaselessly in their queer polyglot language, the scarlet shields on their foreheads shining in the sun.

Presently, close to where I stood hidden by green

branches, a Louisiana heron circled twice, then slanted down with craning neck and dangling legs into the shallow water of a little arm of the cove. There, within a few feet of me, the tall bird set about fishing—a memorable picture. In this region in the warm season herons abound: great blue herons, little blue herons, Louisiana herons, green herons, black-crowned night herons, yellow-crowned night herons, great egrets, snowy egrets, great bitterns and least bitterns. Many of these are beautiful, and in trying to decide which are the most beautiful I have veered back and forth from one to another, generally fixing upon the two egrets because of their spotless whiteness and the filmy plumes which they wear in the breeding season. Yet when I see a Louisiana heron in full nuptial plumage and close at hand, with the sun shining on him, I am always tempted to change my mind again.

I changed it again that morning as I watched that Louisiana heron at a distance of not more than twenty feet. It seemed to me then that I was looking at a masterpiece of painting, colors which delighted the eye with their purity or the softness of their tones: clear blue and clear white, rufous and chestnut, pale brown and slate and gray, red and red-purple and delicate pink, spread in an intricate pattern over a shape of flawless symmetry. It seemed to me, too, that in this slim creature of the air and the

waters I saw the very type of perfect gracefulness. It was beautiful when standing at rest with all its colors lit by the sun; but even more beautiful was it when it stole swiftly yet silently through the shallows, with half its pink legs (which in the bird-books are described as "blackish") submerged, the bright red eyes gleaming, the long, blue, javelin-like bill drawn back ready to strike, the slender, sinuous, plumed neck bent in a sharp yet pleasing curve. The bird was as its best then, for at such moments the consummate grace of its movements was even more notable than its elegance of form; and I said to myself, as I watched it, that here was the spirit, the goddess of the lagoons, the embodiment of their dreamlike, mystical loveliness.

They are dream-like, mysterious, and beautiful, these enchanted waters of the cypress woods, which are the homes and hunting grounds of the herons, and they owe much of their enchantment to the herons themselves. In spring and summer, herons of half a dozen species are among the most numerous and in many ways the most interesting birds of the lagoons; and among the most fascinating places in the whole world of bird-life are the heron cities found here and there on these quiet, secluded waters hidden deep in the woods.

Often these heron cities or villages—for they vary greatly in size—are made up of the nests of several

kinds of herons and of other water-loving birds also. Thus one great blue heron village numbers among its inhabitants many snakebirds or anhingas—strange, fantastic, long-necked creatures allied to the cormorants and so closely resembling the wild turkey in flight that they are called in this region “water turkeys.” Another village, in a particularly lovely lagoon densely wooded with cypress, has for its most distinguished denizens many pairs of the beautiful, carmine-billed white ibis, but includes also in its population anhingas, great egrets, little blue herons, Louisiana herons, black-crowned night herons, and on the remote outskirts a few pairs of yellow-crowned night herons. Still another heron community, the largest that I know and the most wonderful of all, is composed mainly of great egrets and little blue herons, but contains in addition many nests of black-crowned night herons, a number of anhinga nests, and a number of the imposing, bulky castles of sticks built and occupied by the osprey or fish hawk.

A visit to this heron city in spring or early summer is a memorable experience, but it is an experience which can never be described. There is no magic of words which can express the magic of that wild, exquisite, incredible place—that bewildering, kaleidoscopic fairyland. To reach its heart and center you must paddle for more than an hour in a small,

flat-bottomed punt up a long lagoon set in the midst of lonely woods and thickly grown up with smooth-trunked, feathery-foliaged cypresses. Nowhere this side of Paradise, I believe, is there a lovelier journey to be made by man than this little voyage along the winding water lanes of the flooded forest where the egrets live; but its very loveliness benumbs the tongue and the brain, so that afterwards you cannot tell or write about it, because you know at once that the words which you will speak or inscribe on paper will be utterly inadequate. Hence I shall not try to tell of that journey here, a familiar journey to me now, but still as marvelous as it ever was.

The egret city itself bursts suddenly upon you. As your punt wound in and out through the flooded cypress woods, there was much besides sheer beauty to be seen and enjoyed: a flash of broad, snowy wings far off amid the tree-trunks; wood ducks floating on the water or whistling through the air; big, long-winged ospreys screaming shrilly as they circled above their massive nests set in the tops of cypresses; perhaps a great bald eagle soaring high against the blue, or a flock of anhingas sailing round and round like airplanes, their snake-like necks outstretched, their black wings and long tails rigid and motionless. But these, and the great blue heron village which you passed on the way, were only the prelude.

The real miracle of the lagoon lies at the journey's end—the egret city itself.

And if the journey is indescribable, how shall one describe the thing to which it leads—that miraculous aerial whirlpool of color and life? About the egret city the trees fall away, so that there is a sort of open lake in the flooded woods, a lake rimmed round with cypresses and dotted and subdivided with other cypresses and clumps of cypresses, vivid green with the fresh foliage of spring and draped with long pendants of Spanish moss. From the outskirts of the city your coming has been signaled, and gradually yet swiftly an amazing clamor rises and grows louder and louder—a clamor which to those who have never heard it before seems too great and too strange to issue from the throats of birds. An incalculable number of different noises compose it; some of them loud, harsh, and menacing; some of them low, guttural, and mysterious; some of them rasping and cackling; some of them thin, shrill, and piercing; and with this outlandish, astonishing hubbub ringing in your ears, your punt glides out at last from the crowding cypress trunks into the open water of the egrets' lake.

Then, in an instant, the discordant din of your greeting is forgotten in the overwhelming beauty and wonder that meet your eyes. In the trees, in the air, to right, to left, and above, great, immacu-

late egrets white as snow and bedecked with trailing, silky plumes which droop far beyond their tails; egrets in scores and perhaps in hundreds; egrets which seem innumerable and which, at any rate, you cannot count in the bewildering, magnificent confusion of the scene. It is these that instantly fill the eye and the mind, so that for a while you see nothing else. Everywhere in the trees stand the tall, stately, graceful, milk-white birds; everywhere in the air they sail and sweep on wide, spotless, glistening wings. Not until many minutes have passed do you realize that they are only a part of the population of this great, secret city of birds which only a few men and still fewer women have seen.

For it is a secret place, this wonderful metropolis of the great white egret which not many years ago seemed doomed to extinction. Its existence is known to some of those whose business it is to know such things, but only a fortunate few have been privileged to view it during the years that I have known it. Yet for more than a century it has been a stronghold of egrets and other herons, for there is a record of its existence in 1823, and probably it is the only heron city in America whose annals can be traced so far back. There was a time when the plume hunters harried it, and its watery streets were stained red; but that time has passed, and of recent years its population has increased. The egrets, the plume

hunters' particular prey, are probably as numerous now as they ever were; and the little blue herons, night herons, anhingas, and ospreys which complete its population are gaining or holding their own.

I go to the egret city each spring for the sake of the wonder of it, and always I come away exhilarated and yet distressed because I have seen a thing which I cannot put into words. How can I express the splendor of a whole host of egrets filling the air and covering the trees when I have never yet been able to express the loveliness of one egret standing at rest by the margin of a pool? How can I picture the life of that great city of birds when in one small tree of its hundreds of trees I can count as many as twenty-five bird homes? The nests, indeed, seem numberless; and in mid-May perhaps half of them contain young birds in various stages of development, while most of the others contain from one to four bluish or bluish-green eggs. Most of the nests are placed in the cypresses or in bushes of various kinds which have sprung from the rotten wood of logs lying in the water. The young birds do their full share—in fact, the major share—in producing the astonishing clamor which continues in greater or less volume so long as your visit lasts; and each nest of young is a fascinating study in itself.

This, however, is not the time or place for a detailed record of such studies. A book might be writ-

ten about this egret city without giving all the facts. There in spring the life of the lagoons is at its crest, its zenith; but I have set out to tell of the herons of the lagoons and of certain other enchanted waters; and there are many other herons besides these great white egrets, and various other places and incidents of heron life to be touched upon. I remember another May morning when something happened even more memorable, perhaps, than my first never-to-be-forgotten visit to the great egret city in the cypresses.

This was nothing less than the discovery that the toes of certain white birds which I was watching were yellow. A thrilling discovery it was, in truth, but its significance is not obvious at a glance, and some explanation is necessary.

In the heron tribe there are three species which are known as egrets. These are the reddish egret, which seldom strays north of Florida; the great white egret or American egret, the species to which the egrets of the city in the cypresses belong; and the snowy egret, as pure white as the great egret, but much smaller and adorned with curved "aigrette" plumes instead of straight ones. Both the white egrets suffered severely from the depredations of plume hunters before they were checked by law; but the snowies, whose lace-like nuptial plumes brought much more than their weight in gold, suffered more severely than

their larger kinsmen. Indeed, in eastern North America the snowy became so rare that its days were regarded as numbered; and in this region, where formerly it had existed in thousands, it was believed to be virtually extinct.

That is why I was so thrilled by my discovery on that May morning that the white birds which I was watching had yellow toes. Those yellow toes were the distinguishing marks of the snowy egret!

I had been watching the white birds from a distance for perhaps half an hour, as our little motor boat plowed its way down the marsh-bordered river. They were drifting about in the air, in company with some darker birds, above a small, bush-covered islet in the marsh ahead of us. I had watched them without excitement or special interest, for not for an instant did I dream that they were anything out of the ordinary. The little blue heron, a common species, is white during the first few years of its life, and although it lacks aigrette plumes and has dull greenish or blackish toes instead of bright yellow ones, it cannot be distinguished at a distance, in this white phase, from the snowy egret. The dark birds flying about above the islet were little blue herons in the mature, slate-blue plumage, and I had not the slightest doubt that the white birds were immature little blues, familiar sights on these marshes.

A heron city, however, is always an interesting place, even though the herons are common ones; and when our launch had brought us as close to the islet as it could get, we stepped out into the soft marsh mud. About half the distance to the islet had been covered when there burst suddenly upon my delighted vision the amazing spectacle of two sets of yellow toes.

I remember those toes to this day. There was no mistaking them, for they fairly gleamed in the bright sunlight; and they had for background a dense cloud of herons—little blues, Louisianas, black-crowned night herons, and green herons—which had risen as if by magic out of the thickets clothing the island. I knew in that instant that I had found the supposedly vanished snowy egret—that at least one of those white birds was not a little blue in the white phase but a genuine snowy; and the next moment I knew that this was true not only of one of them, but of nearly all of them. For wherever I looked in those few memorable minutes I saw yellow toes—yellow toes standing out in sharp contrast with the black feet (“legs,” as we incorrectly call them) trailing behind each milk-white bird. Up from the bushes in regiments and battalions the herons continued to rise, and every white bird whose outstretched feet I could see in

that flying feathered host was a yellow-toed bird—a snowy egret.

Now that should have been glory enough for one day, but there was more to follow. A little later we found another islet where a still larger colony of snowies was established amid hundreds of herons of the commoner sorts. Perhaps our estimates of the number of snowies breeding on these two islets were wide of the mark, for census-taking is a difficult task amid the incessant movement and confusion of a heron city; but we were in no mood to quibble over a mere question of mathematics. We had found the snowy egret. We had discovered two breeding colonies of an exquisite bird which was thought to be doomed in North America, which for years had been considered extinct in all this region, and which even in Florida, formerly its favorite stronghold, was believed to be on the verge of extinction.

This happened years ago. To-day I can take you out on any summer morning and show you all the yellow toes you may wish to see. And I need not take you far. I have sat on my doorstep in the city and have seen those magical yellow toes pass over me, as a snowy egret, returning from his feeding grounds, took a short cut over the town. For the snowy—the “egret infinitely fair,” to translate somewhat loosely his Latin name—has come back. He has come back in hundreds to these

marshes which his forebears knew long ago. Once more, as in years gone by, he builds his nest and rears his young on little, bush-grown marsh-islets where for generations the milk-white armies nested before the plume hunters came. And he has come back largely because the two islets where we discovered those breeding colonies of snowies on that May day were from that time forward protected and preserved.

To have helped in some slight measure to save such beauty as that which the snowy egret contributes to the world is to have done at least one worth-while thing; and so I look back with more than a little satisfaction to that happy-starred drama of the yellow toes.

The snowy is one of the smallest as well as, in most regions, the rarest of the herons. Oddly enough—for the big birds are generally killed out earliest—the most familiar and best known heron is also, with one exception, the largest. This is the great blue heron, which overtops even the great egret and is second in size only to the great white heron of southern Florida, a bird practically unknown in this country outside that state.

The great blue herons of the lagoons and marshes that I know are probably nearly as tall as that white giant of the remote Florida coasts. They are taller than the typical great blue, and the chances are that

they belong to the imposing race or sub-species known as Ward's heron. There is a village of great blues which I visit every spring largely for the sake of seeing the big birds come down from the high air to the nests where their young ones await them. Their descent is a beautiful sight. All afternoon they come flying in from the marshes and creeks where they have been seeking food for their ravenous progeny. As a rule, they fly high, their long necks doubled and folded in that queer fashion characteristic of all herons, their long legs trailing behind them. With stately, measured beats they sweep down the wind, then turn, head up into the breeze, and begin to descend. Their wide, ash-blue wings are half-closed and sharply curved; their slender necks are half-unfolded; their slim legs dangle beneath them. Lightly, buoyantly, they float down between the cypress tops, and in a moment more they stand at rest, each on his or her own nest, their white crests erect, their long, black head-feathers waving, and all those delicate nuptial plumes which adorn them in the spring fluttering in the breeze.

What sights those herons must see as they look down from their inaccessible castles in the tall cypresses! They can see in the dark, for not infrequently they fish at night, and it is at night that the wildest of the wild dwellers in the woods come to the edge of the heron town. When last I visited

that village of great blues, I found that a few hours before my arrival a big wildcat or bay lynx had walked along the bank where I sat. The clean, graceful hoofmarks of a whitetail buck were cut deep in the soft soil near by. There were tracks of foxes, too, and other smaller, ill-defined tracks which might have been made by a mink; and, as usual, in the wet places I found the queer half-human prints of several raccoons. All these wild four-foots the keen-eyed herons may see night after night if they are not fast asleep high up in their tree-top homes.

For it is not only the herons themselves that make the heron cities fascinating places. The wildness, as well as the loveliness, of the environment contributes to that fascination; and besides the herons, there are many other living things that lend enchantment to the forest lagoons. Of these, however, there is not space to tell here, nor would it be well to enter upon a detailed account of the everyday habits and home life of herons, for these have been well known for years and are set forth in many books. I want to tell, instead, of two or three odd things that I have seen, incidents of heron life which are out of the ordinary and some of which I have never seen reported elsewhere.

I wonder whether any other observer has ever watched our American herons catching flies on cows

and oxen. I saw that strange sight on a still, sultry morning of last July, by the shore of a large, open lagoon where I had been watching a pair of gallinules which had with them three young ones about two-thirds grown. For a while the gallinules were the center of attraction as they swam slowly about in the water. But often my gaze shifted to a Louisiana heron and several green herons fishing along the edges of the lake; and occasionally my eyes rested upon a Jersey cow and a big, hornless, red ox standing in the water amid the aquatic growths within a few feet of the shore.

The water was deep, and the cow and ox were almost submerged, only their heads and necks and the upper portion of their backs being visible above the dense mat of green water-weed covering the surface. Presently, while I was watching the gallinules, a Louisiana heron and a little blue heron flew in from the other shore of the lagoon and lit near the cattle. With quick, eager steps, they walked across the floating water-weed carpet, the Louisiana approaching the ox and the blue heron heading toward the Jersey. Struck by the businesslike directness of their movements, I watched them with keen interest and in a moment saw something that I had never seen before.

Each heron walked straight up to the animal which it had selected and, extending its long neck

and bill, jabbed at the animal's flank. One might have supposed at first glance that here were two crazy herons deliberately attacking a cow and an ox; but in an instant it was plain that the birds were looking not for a fight, but for food. They were not trying to assault these bovine invaders of the lagoon, but, on the contrary, were making a good thing out of the invasion.

They were catching and swallowing the many big flies congregated upon and about the cow and the ox. Up and down they walked on the water-weed carpet, close beside the motionless cattle, and every few moments the long, sharp bill of one of them would dart forward as it plucked a fly from the hairy hide of the complacent cud-chewer, which seemed well content to provide its feathered attendant with a meal. Then, to my vast delight, the blue heron did the thing that I had been hoping one of them would do. He mounted the back of the cow, only a few inches of which showed above the weed-covered water, and stood there for several moments just above the root of the animal's tail; and presently the Louisiana heron perched himself similarly upon the back of the ox!

Here was something new in heron life. It was something of no great practical importance and with nothing beautiful about it; but, none the less, it was a new sight, a new experience, and therefore

memorable. I had never before seen herons dancing attendance upon cattle and actually perching on their backs, and I have never read of anything of the sort occurring in this country: and to find something new in the lives of herons, which are not strongly individualistic birds and the habits of which are well known, is decidedly unusual.

Yet, not long before this, I had a somewhat similar experience. I had always wondered at Audubon's account of a great blue heron "giving chase to a fish hawk whilst the latter was pursuing its way through the air toward a place where it could feed on the fish which it bore in its talons." The heron, says that great naturalist, "soon overtook the hawk, and at the very first lunge made by it, the latter dropped its quarry, when the heron sailed slowly toward the ground, where it no doubt found the fish."

This, I felt sure, must have been an exceptional case, for the fish hawk or osprey is a well-armed and powerful bird. Moreover, he had always been a sort of hero of mine among the feathered warriors of the air, and I did not like to think that, in spite of his long, sharp claws and trenchant bill, his spirit was so pusillanimous that he would permit himself to be bullied by so peaceable a bird as a heron.

One morning I was watching an osprey nest in a tall, dead tree when a great blue heron approached.

One of the ospreys was circling above the tree, and the heron, flying at about the level of the tree-top, passed under the osprey and within a few yards of the nest. Suddenly, when the heron was already some little distance away, the osprey half-closed his wings and shot downward and forward at terrific speed. The heron stretched his long neck and fled as fast as his broad pinions could carry him, but the hawk, coming from above and behind, overtook him almost as though he were standing still. Just at the wrong moment the two big birds passed out of sight behind a clump of pines, but I heard a sudden loud squawk of fright from the heron, and I have little doubt that the osprey struck him. At any rate, the incident served to restore my good opinion of the osprey's courage—at least, so far as herons were concerned.

One more incident of heron life, and I have done. It took place on a lonely sea beach where a narrow peninsula of smooth, clean sand runs out between the ocean and a little inlet, and it had for background the crimson and gold of a magnificent September sunset. There was no sign or sound of man; only the glassy ocean, where not a sail was in sight, the curving beach, the dunes, the level sands, the wide green marshes, and beyond them the hazy purple woods.

From far across the marshes came a flock of fifteen

snowy egrets homeward bound for the hummock where they would spend the night. Suddenly they swerved from their straight course, turned toward the ocean, slanted down across the beach, and lit on the point of sand between the inlet and the sea.

Then they began to dance. Here and there they moved with slow, stately, rhythmic tread, bowing their heads, bending their long, slender necks, sometimes half-opening their spotless wings. At first, only two or three birds took part; but soon all fifteen of them, seized by a strange, irresistible ecstasy which spread from bird to bird, were dancing there before me, pacing and winding in and out in a sort of mystic maze. They wore no plumes, for the season of love was long past. But in the soft light of late afternoon their slim bodies gleamed with an amazing whiteness; and behind and above them, while they danced, glowed the vast and splendid tapestry of the painted sky.

As the gold and crimson of that gorgeous background dimmed, the Dance of the Snowies ended. With one accord, as though some leader among them had given a signal, they all took to the air. As far as my eye could see, I followed their flight across the marshes, until they were lost in the blue evening haze.

ISLAND WILD FOLK

WE lay flat in the soft sand on the shoulder of a low dune and, scarcely daring to breathe, watched the monster coming. In the white moonlight its armored sides and back seemed to glisten with the water of the sea from which it had just emerged. The size of it amazed us. Never had I dreamed that great sea creatures like this walked the lonely beaches of the coast by night; and as it crawled ponderously nearer and nearer, looming all the larger in the moonlight because my eyes were so close to the surface of the ground, it recalled the image of some strange, extinct reptile of the Age of Reptiles. Fascinated, and perhaps a little afraid, for it was heading almost directly toward us, I watched it as it came slowly on; and I was not sorry when, a moment later, it turned slightly and, passing us at a distance of about thirty feet, disappeared behind a ridge of sand. Determined to secure the coveted treasure which now seemed almost within our grasp, we crept around the side of the dune and on hands and knees followed the broad trail.

Now a narrative so stirringly begun should have an equally exciting ending; but, unfortunately, to this one there is no ending at all, because I cannot remember how the adventure ended. I was a boy then; and that big sea turtle, which came up so strangely out of the sea and lumbered heavily across the moonlit sands that night to lay its eggs above high-water mark, was the first of these great ocean dwellers that I had ever seen. Several other adventures, gloriously thrilling to a youngster new to such things, had already befallen us; it was my first night on a lonely beach of an island which seemed to me very lonely and wild; and I think it must have been one of those nights when the light of the moon, abetted by a mistiness in the air or by the exaggerating effect of moisture held in suspension, plays especially queer tricks on human eyes.

Somewhere therein may lie the reason why the first part of this nocturnal encounter is impressed so vividly upon my mind, while all that followed is but a hazy and uncertain memory. I have been on many turtle-egg hunts since then, and the conclusion of this one is confused with others of later date, so that I cannot now recall whether or not we got the eggs which we desired so dearly. But the strange coming of the monster out of the roaring surf and across the beach to excavate its nest among the dunes, the prehistoric look of it as it came, its

astonishing bulk as we, flat on our stomachs, saw it loom against the sky line in the magnifying moonlight, the atmosphere of mystery that hung about the whole adventure—all these were things that could never be forgotten.

It was an adventure to be thankful for. Ever since then the big sea turtles of this coast have been creatures of mystery; and ever since that night the long, low barrier islands along the edge of the sea, where the turtles come up out of the surf by the light of the moon to lay their eggs in the sand, have been islands of enchantment. There are more than a hundred miles of these barrier islands, strung along the South Carolina coast from Winyah Bay to Tybee Roads, separated from one another by inlets some of which are small and shallow, while others are really the deep, wide mouths of large rivers. In front of the islands lies the ocean, and behind them, dividing them from the mainland, stretch wide plains of marsh through which wind numberless salt-water creeks, opening here and there into broad, shallow sounds. Most of them are wild and lonely places, uninhabited except perhaps by some oyster planter or fisherman in his little house on the inlet shore; and, though some of them are small and are little more than sand reefs, others are eight or ten miles in length and are covered, except a strip of sea beach and a belt of

dunes behind it, by dense, half-tropical woods and thickets.

These barrier-island woods, although containing many of the same plant forms, are utterly unlike the woods of the mainland. They are jungles rather than forests. Tall palmettos, naked almost to their tops or bristling with the stubs of cast-off lateral fronds, are on every side. The live-oaks and cedars are short and squat and often fantastically twisted and bent, and the thickets of myrtle and cassena are so dense that sometimes it is necessary to hack your way through them. Long, slender vines, almost as strong as wire, impede your passage. The ground is uneven and treacherous, now rising into a little hill, now falling into a wet hollow deep in semi-aquatic grass; and here and there, some of them hedged about by almost impenetrable reeds, are pools or ponds of glassy, wine-colored water. There is no trace in these island jungles of the calm and mystical loveliness which pervades the woods and fields and the river marshes of the Carolina plantation country. If there is beauty in them it is a shaggy and uncouth beauty. To the average man they are as intolerable as the cool, clean beaches of the barrier isles are inviting and delightful; yet, because of the wild things that live in them, they are fascinating places, and all the more fascinating because to most people they are forbidden ground.

It is in summer that the animal life of the island woods is most abundant, and it is in summer, therefore, that they are most interesting to the naturalist; but unless you are very firmly bent upon some definite quest, you are not likely to remain long in these sea-side wildernesses in the warm season. The island jungle has abundant means of making the intruder regret his rashness. It calls to its aid the insect armies that have their headquarters in its recesses, armies of many battalions, flying in clouds through the air, marching in unseen myriads over the ground, lying in wait in the green ambush of thicket and vine tangle. It is a very tough or a very determined explorer who will still push on despite the incessant attacks of these vast hordes of tiny warriors who seem to be rendered all the more vigorous and fierce by the terrific heat; and so the island jungles in summer remain almost inviolate, a stronghold of the wild creatures into which man seldom penetrates far and in which he seldom tarries long.

In winter one may explore the island woods without great difficulty, but in winter much of their mystery and fascination has gone out of them. Thus it is only in the warm season that you may hope to hear the wild music of a bull alligator—and even then this is a rare sound on the barrier isles—or see at sunset a flock of white herons come flying in

from the marshes to drop, with craning necks and dangling legs, down to their sleeping place in the inaccessible heart of the woods. In winter most of the herons have gone farther south, and the alligators have withdrawn into their secret dens, to remain hidden there until the succeeding spring. It is as though the jungle, unable to defend itself from invasion when the cool weather comes, conceals or sends away its most precious possessions until it may safely bring them back again. Thus it preserves its mystery and remains, summer after summer, as alluring as ever.

Yet, even in winter, although they have then lost much of this element of mystery, the island woods are full of interest. Thus late fall and early winter are the seasons of love and of mating for the bald eagles of the coast, when, throwing their royal dignity to the winds, they swoop and swerve above the woods and marshes and chase each other madly through the air. By the middle of January at the latest the two big white eggs have been laid in a huge castle of sticks, bark, and Spanish moss built in the top of some tall pine. The barrier islands are favorite nesting places, not only because of their loneliness and inaccessibility, but also because of their proximity to the sea; and the birds return to the same nest year after year, building a new nest only when some disaster befalls the

old one or some venturesome collector robs it of its eggs.

There is something characteristic of the great bird itself, and something attractive to the mind, in the permanence of the eagle's home. Most birds' nests are ephemeral things. After a few weeks or months they are gone, and not only gone, but forgotten. The eagle's home is like an ancestral mansion. It stands year after year, enduring for a longer time than many a man lives, cared for and kept in repair by the winged architects who built it and who seem to feel a genuine affection for it. On a plantation near the coast there is a nest in a pine one hundred and twelve feet above the ground. For more than fifty years the same pair of eagles have inhabited this nest;* and it is possible that it will still be in use when houses that men are building to-day, out of the kind of lumber with which one must now be content, have fallen into ruin.

The eagles are the kings of the airy spaces above the barrier islands. They are splendid, stalwart kings. Of all feathered creatures, the eagle is at once the most inspiring and the most beautiful; for there are many kinds or grades of beauty among birds, and the eagle's is the royal kind. No other

* This statement is made on the excellent authority of my friend Arthur T. Wayne, widely known as an ornithologist, who lives not far from this eagle nest and has made a careful study of its inhabitants.

bird, perhaps no other animal of any sort except the serpent, so deeply stirs the imagination; and this is so not only because of his large size, his rarity in most regions, and his supposed ferocity, as illustrated by the many false tales that are told of babies carried away through the air, but also because he seems the supreme example in nature of physical perfection and the very type of wildness and freedom. The mere sight of an eagle lifts up the spirit. It was not only because the eagle was the Roman bird that the soldiers of Germanicus sprang forward with redoubled ardor to the attack when seven of these great winged warriors flew out in front of the Romans and seemed to marshal the legions on their way. I have never seen seven eagles at once, but I have seen as many as four, and that, to my mind, was so fine a sight that it almost made me forget the thrilling business upon which I was engaged at the moment—the business of landing, or, rather, trying to land, a big channel bass, a twenty pounder at the least, with which I was having a glorious tussle in the surf one autumn a year or so ago.

The bass won, and perhaps it was to his own strength and courage, rather than to my poor handling of my rod, that he owed his victory; but during the brief struggle amid the breakers before he shook the hook out of his mouth, I was thinking al-

most as much of the four great birds over my head as of the big bronze fighting fish in the foamy water before me, and this may well have played a part in my discomfiture. At any rate, when the bass had gone on his way triumphant, I took time to look at the eagles before casting my line into the surf again. They were soaring directly above me, two of them fairly low, the two others so far up that at times they faded into the blue of the sky. How long they had been there, sweeping round and round in great circles, I do not know; but some two hours later two of the four were still in the high heavens, and I wondered, as I had wondered many times before on similar occasions, whether they were not fast asleep up in the blue. The mystery of the soaring bird, "the way of an eagle in the air," has puzzled many wise men after Solomon. How do we know that the eagles do not set their wings, lay a course which will keep them swinging constantly in circles, and then calmly go to sleep up in their high kingdom where no harm can come to them?

If they are not actually asleep at such times, at least this high soaring in wide circles or ellipses is the next thing to sleep.

Yonder bird

Which floats, as if at rest,

In those blue tracts above the thunder, where

No vapors cloud the stainless air,
And never sound is heard—

so wrote Henry Timrod sixty years ago, and it may well have been a soaring eagle that was the inspiration of these lines, illumined by one memorable phrase, though the chances are that it was a soaring turkey buzzard. But whether it was the eagle or the buzzard that Timrod had in mind, he might have pictured it as not merely seeming to be at rest, but as being actually at rest in the sense of repose; for, although, according to the orthodox view, this lofty soaring is a form of exercise, I think there is little doubt that when the big birds swing round and round, sometimes for an hour or even for several hours at a time, in the solitudes of the upper air, they are doing for their muscles and sinews just what a man does for his when, being weary, he stretches himself upon a bed or couch.


They are resting, taking their ease, enjoying the refreshment which is obtained by the suspension of physical exertion. There is so little effort in their soaring that it requires the employment of only a minute quantity of energy, the use of only a tiny portion of the bird's muscular equipment; and, meanwhile, all the rest of its powerful and complex physical mechanism is in repose, while, in large degree—perhaps to the point of actual slumber—

its mental activities are probably suspended. It is only in these upper spaces of the air that the eagle is perfectly safe. Down near the earth, in a tree among the dunes, or even in the heart of the island woods, he must be conscious always of the possibility of danger, or, at least, of annoyance, and his senses must remain more or less active and alert, like sentinels at their posts, ready to sound a warning. But in those blue tracts of which Timrod speaks the eagle can find perfect security, complete freedom from danger of any kind; and that, no doubt, is one reason why he seeks those lofty regions for rest and, I suspect, for slumber, spending more time there, in all likelihood, than we realize, since it is only by chance that the eye lights upon him, a mere dim speck upon the vast face of the sky.

This ability to mount high above reach of all foes and to spend much of his time, perhaps a large portion of each day, in a place of perfect safety is probably a factor of great importance to the eagle in the solution of his life problems; for at other times he "lives dangerously," having in man a cruel and relentless enemy who too often shoots him down merely because he is big and splendid looking and because, strangely enough, the average man regards the killing of an eagle as something to be proud of, although it ought to land him in jail. The eagle has survived in considerable numbers among the barrier

islands because they are wild and lonely refuges and because the waters round about them abound in fish, which are his favorite food. The fish of the shallow waters offshore, of the inlets between the islands, and of the innumerable creeks winding through the marshes behind them form the principal food supply of many of the larger forms of island life. Yet it is an odd fact that some of the denizens of the islands who are most fond of fish never catch fish for themselves. Even the eagles, though living almost entirely on fish, very seldom go fishing, but obtain their fresh sea food mainly by robbing the ospreys or by picking up from the water the carcasses of catfish which have been bitten in half by larger fish or by porpoises, and the forward portion of which is seldom swallowed because of the sharp, stiff spines in the catfish's fins.

Some of the snakes of the island woods dine sumptuously in spring and summer upon various kinds of salt-water fish, especially the mullet, which swarm in enormous schools in the marsh creeks and off the island beaches. Yet these snakes rarely, if ever, approach the salt water and certainly never captured a living salt-water fish in their lives. They, too, rely upon a purveyor, a middleman, to get their fish for them. Wherever herons nest in the island woods, fragments of the small fish which they bring for their young drop from the nests to the ground



beneath; and to secure these tidbits the snakes congregate, sometimes in large numbers, under the nests and, if the heron community is a fairly large one, subsist for a considerable period mainly upon the food which they obtain in this way. I have seen scores of moccasins assembled under a great blue heron village, waiting, like the traditional South Sea Islander under his breadfruit tree, for their dinners to drop into their mouths. Probably the snakes are not the only jungle dwellers which profit by the herons' industry in catching so many mullet and their carelessness in letting so many of them fall to the ground. The chances are that after dark 'possums and raccoons prowl about under the nests to see what they can pick up, and that on the larger islands the feathered families in the pines can look down sometimes and see the dim, slinking shape of a wildcat.

They may not see many wildcats—though the shy, elusive lynx is probably more abundant on the islands than it seems—but they must see scores or even hundreds of raccoons. The latter flourish in almost incredible numbers on some of the larger islands. Two winters ago one man caught in his traps on one island more than four hundred of these animals, yet raccoon tracks were as numerous as ever the following autumn, the sands in some places being literally criss-crossed with trails, as though

dozens of 'coons had gathered there the night before. Most of the trails that one finds in the loose, soft sand between the woods and the beach are made by these and other woods dwellers. They come out of the jungle and, after winding around for greater or shorter distances among the dunes, lead back into the jungle again. But the most interesting trail of all comes not from the jungle, but from the sea, and goes back into the sea—the wide, straight trail or “crawl” of the big loggerhead turtle.

To the negro beach comber a turtle crawl is only a turtle crawl, a track in the sand which will lead him, if he is a skilful turtle-egg hunter, to a subterranean nest with its rich store of from sixty to two hundred soft-shelled, delicious eggs. But a turtle crawl is really much more than that. It is a thing almost unparalleled in nature, the visible trace or record of an almost unique phenomenon which does not properly belong to this age of the world, but has come down to it from ages past and gone. There is something grotesque and monstrous, even something uncanny, in the picture which a turtle trail paints in the mind—a great, waddling, ponderous sea creature, perhaps three times the weight of a man, emerging from the surf by night in the ghostly loneliness of the moonlit beach, and lumbering heavily across the strand, to

vanish presently among the shadowy dunes; then, when its business on land has been completed, waddling back across the dim beach and disappearing into the breakers, from which it will never emerge again until another year has passed; and if one tries to analyze and explain the strangeness of this picture, he will conclude that it is compounded of several elements, but that the *unnaturalness* of the whole proceeding is the principal reason why it so powerfully fascinates the mind.

It is an almost invariable rule that the creatures of the sea do not emerge from the sea. Inhabitants of fresh-water rivers and lakes—alligators and water serpents, for instance—spend much of their time upon the banks; land animals sometimes go down into the ocean or into arms of the ocean, such as inlets and bays; but the animals of the ocean do not come out upon the land. With very few exceptions, they remain always in their accustomed element and are inseparable from it; and so this emergence of the sea turtle runs counter to one's instinctive idea of the natural order of things and produces somewhat the effect of a violation of the laws of nature. And not only does it seem in this sense unnatural, but there is even something of the supernatural about it, for it recalls irresistibly old legends of fabulous monsters of the sea. Very seldom in nature, but very often in fable and myth,

the dwellers in the deep come from their invisible, watery homes out upon the solid land; and so mysterious and so terrifying was the ocean with its unknown inhabitants that there was generally something evil and sinister about these mythical visitations, and the myth makers could conceive of few things more dreadful or more terrible than this image of an apparition from the ocean's depths.

One is reminded of William Butler Yeats's fantastically beautiful poem, "The Green Helmet," inspired, I suppose, by some old Irish myth, in which the Black Men, with heads like the heads of cats, appear out of the "misty moonlit sea" to claim, as the watchers in the little house believe, their awful debt of blood.

Coal-black, and headed like cats,
They came up over the strand—

but it was not their coal-blackness nor their catlike heads that made them so terrible to Conall and Laegaire. Rather it was the fact that they had come up out of the sea, the vast, mystical, unknown, and unknowable sea. And although we moderns no longer believe in such things and have no fear, as we walk some lonely beach by night, that a strange and awful sea being may emerge

suddenly from the waves and seize us in clammy arms and carry us down to a dark sea cave, there lingers in us still some trace of that old feeling about the sea and sea apparitions, and there is still something, not terrifying, but grotesque and almost supernatural, in the idea of a great sea creature coming up out of the moaning surf in the darkness to walk upon the land.

The beach comber, coming upon a turtle trail leading up from the waves, knows and feels nothing of this. Nor does he know, as he follows the trail across the beach to the soft sands above high-water mark, that it is possible to travel along that trail to stranger countries than he has ever dreamed of. The sea turtles of to-day do not really belong to to-day. They are feeble reminders of an ancient race which came to its prime millions of years ago and which now has almost vanished. These latter-day sea turtles seem huge to us, and they are huge compared with most modern reptiles, some of them weighing more than five hundred pounds; but they are mere pygmies beside some of the turtles which flourished in the Cretaceous seas when great fish-eating mosasaurs, forty or forty-five feet long, patrolled the littoral waters where herds of porpoises now swim up and down, and when long-limbed, dragonlike dinosaurs, twice as tall as a man and twice as long as the longest crocodile, sometimes

stalked along the beach. The largest of these ancient turtles was Archelon, whose length from stem to stern was not less than twelve and perhaps as much as fifteen feet, and whose weight was about two tons; and not only were there mightier turtles in those days than any now living, but the number of species was vastly greater, so that often in the egg-laying season the ancient beach must have swarmed with these strange creatures of many kinds and shapes, some of them so huge that it is hard to see how they managed to drag their colossal bodies over the sand. Those were the palmy days of the turtle tribe; and every turtle trail on the beaches of the barrier islands leads the mind back and back and back, through all the changes of the ever-changing world of the past, to the shore of the Cretaceous ocean, where, tens of thousands of centuries ago, Archelon drew her mammoth bulk up out of the breakers and crawled ponderously across the beach to the place where she would scoop out her nest in the sand and lay her eggs.

There is yet another reason why a turtle trail is the most interesting animal track that one may find on the barrier islands. It is full of the fascination that clings to far journeys into unknown seas. If one could follow it through the water after it leaves the beach, there is no telling where it would take him, for the big marine chelonians

are found in all the tropical and semi-tropical oceans, and, for aught that is known to the contrary, the individual turtles which lay their eggs on these beaches may have circumnavigated the globe once or twice in the course of their lives. If that is unlikely, it is certain, at any rate, that these creatures are great travelers. All the warm seas are theirs to wander over, and, since they live to a great age, and come ashore only once each year, for the purpose of laying their eggs, they have plenty of time for wandering. It is an odd fact that of all the wild creatures of the islands—except, of course, the birds—these seemingly sluggish giants are the most mobile, the freest, the least circumscribed by barriers. They can visit Brazil or Africa or Borneo if they choose, whereas most of the other forms of island life are confined pretty closely to the island on which they first saw the light.

Next to the turtles, the raccoons and minks are probably the greatest rovers among the four-footed island dwellers. The soft, boggy soil of the marshes behind the islands forms no barrier for them, and they roam widely across the green marsh plains, often swimming the marsh creeks, and thus pass from one island to another. The deer, too, which have their homes on the larger islands of the chain, travel from one to another, not by way of the marshes, but by swimming the inlets. On these

night journeys up and down the coast the deer sometimes visit even the smaller islands where there is little cover and where ordinarily no deer are to be found. A hunter and woodsman sent me the other day an account of an adventure with an island buck which seems to me especially interesting because it throws light upon a question concerning which little precise information is to be had—the question how far a deer can jump.

"I was walking," he said, "through the woods toward the beach, accompanied by a collie that had been trained to handling and driving cattle. He had trotted ahead of me and reached the open beach when I was yet thirty yards from it. The brush was sparse at this spot and I saw a big buck lying on my left and within fifteen feet. I stood looking at him for perhaps five seconds, when he rose and was off with a rush to the beach.

"The collie saw him coming and seemed to think it his duty to take charge and drive him down the beach and round to the cow pen. It was a beautiful race for a moment. The collie kept between the deer and the woods for about seventy-five yards, after which the deer steadily gained, and entered the woods thirty yards ahead of the dog and two hundred and fifty yards from the spot where he came out. Five minutes later the dog returned. I think the excuse he gave himself for

his failure to carry out his training with this new breed of kine was that it would be useless to pen it, anyway, as the fence would not hold an animal that could jump like that.

"Later we obtained a tape line and measured a number of the deer's strides on the beach. They ranged from sixteen to twenty-eight feet, but one leap (measured from front foot to front foot) was thirty-one feet one inch. This race was on a clean, level part of the beach, with nothing in the way and no apparent incentive for a specially long leap, so I assume the buck could have done better than that if he had tried."

Perhaps he could have, but thirty-one feet one inch seems a fairly good jump for an animal that travels on four legs and has no wings.

Most of the barrier islands, I have said, are wild and lonely places. Some of them are lonelier today than they were seventy-five or a hundred years ago. Thus there is one small island, where I have often fished in the surf, which was once the site of a town. Here stood Edingsville, the summer home of the prosperous planters who farmed the fertile soil of larger islands lying between the more southerly barrier isles and the mainland and who lived like lords on their fine plantations, where they grew the best long-staple cotton in the world. There were three churches, it is said, and more than sixty

houses in Edingsville, some of them large, three-storied structures, for the landowners of the coast were of the best blood of the South, and some were men of great wealth as wealth was reckoned then.

To-day scarcely a trace of their little seaside city remains. A few short, broken posts projecting from the sand at low tide, here and there a litter of loose bricks washed about by the waves, some fragments of the old "tabby" concrete in common use in those days—only these are left to tell the story. Long ago, no man now living knows just when, the ocean began to march against the town, and year after year it advanced, inch by inch, foot by foot, steadily and relentlessly. The disastrous ending of the Civil War, reducing most of the planters from affluence to poverty, had already dimmed Edingsville's gayety, and the invading ocean seemed bent upon completing the destruction which war had begun. Finally a great hurricane sent giant breakers surging through the place, and the planters realized that it was no longer safe to trifle with the Atlantic. Most of the remaining houses were dismantled for the sake of the good lumber in them; and now, the sea having continued its slow onward march, a man might walk from end to end of Edingsville beach and never guess that out where the long rollers are curling once stood three rows of

dwellings, extending for nearly three miles along the sands.

Nature has reclaimed her own. Resentful of man's intrusion upon her lonely beaches, she has called the ocean to her aid and has driven him back whence he came. Not long ago a deer—a white deer, by the way—which had swum across the inlet from the next barrier island, was killed at low tide on the sands which were once the back yards of Edingsville. I have caught many a channel bass where the village houses once stood, and have seen great sharks swim over the site of the town, and herds of porpoises plunge and roll in the breakers where, half a century and more ago, men and women walked along the sandy streets; and some moonlit night in June I am going down to this beach and hide among the dunes and see a big turtle come up out of the surf. I have found turtle trails there, and I can see the turtles themselves if I take the trouble to look for them in the season of turtles. It will be worth the trouble; for I can think of few sights more strange than the sight of one of these armored, barnacle-incrusted sea monsters coming up in the night out of Edingsville's watery tomb.

DRAGON MUSIC AND GHOSTS

THE road that we were traveling an hour before dawn on a morning in May passes through a country abounding in foxes and ghosts. Lest the reader take fright, the ghosts are not dangerous, and you need not see them unless you so desire. We saw none along the way because we were thinking about other things; but we did see a fox, just for an instant, in the glare of the automobile headlight, at a place where thick swampy woods border the road. It made a good beginning for the day, and we felt that our queer quest—which, however, had nothing to do with foxes—was going to be crowned with success.

It is said that there are seven thousand kinds of lunacy. Ours is the kind that will get you out of bed at 3.30 o'clock A.M., and send you fourteen miles out into the woods to hear dragons bellow. A certain negro had put the notion in our heads. He lives close by the shore of a beautiful lagoon in the Low Country of South Carolina, and he asserted that never before had he listened to such alligator-concerts as those which had awakened him

each morning for several mornings past. There were more 'gators and bigger 'gators in the lagoon, he said, than had ever been known there before, and, judging from the noise that they made in the early mornings, they seemed to consider themselves owners of the place. We had heard alligators boom their long-drawn mournful melodies in the old rice-field backwaters and along the Low Country rivers and creeks, but we had never listened to such a chorus as this man described. It seemed worth while to hear this dragon music.

We had all but lost hope of hearing it, however, when, just at the beginning of dawn, we pushed and poled the little bateau, which we found at the lagoon's edge, through the thick aquatic growths along the shore out into the open water. If the dragons were going to sing, it was time for them to start singing. They are queer creatures, these big saurians. Why they should lift up their doleful voices along the rivers and backwaters on one spring morning and remain mum the next I do not know, but such is their exasperating habit. Apparently this was one of their silent days; but if we could not hear them we could reasonably expect to see them, and we paddled on.

As yet it was too dark to see what moved on the surface of the water—too dark to see anything except the tall columns of mist drifting down the

lagoon, vague gigantic shapes taking on all sorts of fantastic likenesses in the dim light. Dawn and dusk are the best times in the old plantation country, for it is a country full of old wistful memories and wraiths out of the past. Four miles or so to the northwest of us, where we floated amid the dawn mists, was the site of Crowfield Hall, an estate of the Middletons, one of the great families of the Province. When Eliza Lucas visited Crowfield, about 1742, she wrote to a friend in England that new beauties discovered themselves on every hand—a “spacious walk a thousand feet long,” a lawn “ornamented in a Serpentine manner with Flowers . . . a large square boling green, sunk a little below the level of the rest of the garden,” a lake “with a mount rising out of the middle” and upon it “a roman temple.”

There were great days at Crowfield then. To-day the woods have swallowed the place, and nothing is left to tell the story. The old house has gone; but near the eastern shore of the lagoon the parish church of “St. James, Goose Creek,” where the people of Crowfield and all the neighboring plantations worshiped, still stands amid ancient discolored tombs. In the rectory of this church, according to tradition, “Mad Archie” Campbell of Scotland won his maddest bet. At a ball in Charleston, then held by the British, Captain

Campbell—so runs the story—staked his Arab war horse against fifty pounds that within three days he would win the proud Tory beauty, Paulina Phelps. He took her driving in his gig, a wild drive at breakneck speed over rough woods roads and wilderness trails; and so frantic was his love-making that when he lifted her from the gig at the rectory of St. James in the forest, the girl was almost in a faint. Parson Ellington was no more able than she to resist the crack-brained, masterful young Scotchman. The minister mumbled something, but when a pistol was leveled at his head he thought it best to do as he was ordered—and “Mad Archie’s” precious Arabian was safe.

This is the stuff—these old memories and legends—of which the ghosts of the Low Country are made, ghosts which the mind conjures up out of the adventurous and romantic past. Most of them come from the old plantations, like Crowfield, Wantoot, Medway, Rice Hope, Hampton, Wap-paolah, Tomotley, Mepkin, Wadboo, Pimlico, and Parnassus, and from forgotten battlefields hidden in the woods. Near the lagoon where we were floating there is one such battlefield. There Captain Chicken met the Indians drunk with blood after a frightful massacre near the Santee, fought them to a standstill, and saved the town. There must have been phantoms from that battlefield in the drifting

mist columns that morning, and we might have seen some of them had not the strangest feathered inhabitant of the lagoon put an end to our ghost hunting.

We saw the big bird, as the light grew stronger, circling above tall pines that came down to the edge of the water. Up there night was over, day had come, and we had a fine view of *Anhinga anhinga*, the snakebird, as he swung round and round above the trees, flapping his wings at intervals, then sailing like a hawk. "Water turkeys," the Low Country woodsmen call the Anhingas, a fairly good descriptive title, since they are lovers of lagoons and backwaters and since their fanlike tails give them somewhat the appearance of the wild turkey in flight. But the name is too commonplace for so uncanny a creature. Anhinga is the Spirit of the Swamp—an evil spirit, one is apt to think, as one studies the black pterodactyl-like being perched in some tall dead tree rising out of the water, his somber wings half spread after the manner of a vulture, his incredibly long and snake-like neck thrusting this way and that as he watches with sharp little eyes all that goes on around him.

Nearly always, it seems to me, I have seen the Anhinga in places memorable for their tragic associations. Perhaps this superstition arose out of my earliest experiences with the bird. One spring morn-

ing many years ago I was paddling for the first time along the upper reaches of a long, narrow lagoon. Dense, dark forest hemmed the place in, and many trees stood well out in the water, which was very high, and the surface of which was dotted with thickets of willow through which we steered a tortuous course. It had been a fairly adventurous morning. The thickets were alive with birds. Ringing out above the crazy laughter and doleful moaning of scores of gallinules, the spring music of hundreds of songsters filled our ears, while the bright colors of nonpareils, summer tanagers, orchard orioles, and prothonotary warblers flashed in the sun. Rounding a clump of willows, we had come upon a wood duck and her brood of little ones swimming on the still water—a rare and beautiful sight; and once, paddling as silently as we could, we came almost within a boat length of a big alligator, apparently sleeping, half submerged, in the seclusion of a little willow-bordered grotto of the lagoon. Down he went with a heave and surge of the dark water; and we were still chuckling over the unseemly haste of his disappearance when, glancing up, I saw circling in the air a strange long-necked bird which I knew at once was none other than Anhinga the snakebird, until that moment a half-mythical being in my mind, as unreal as Archaeopteryx or the toothed Hesperornis. Thrilled by

the sight, we headed the punt for the bank, intent on exploring the woods along the shore above which the weird fowl was soaring.

It was a fruitless search. We found no Anhinga rookery either in the trees or in the willows at the water's edge. But in the woods we came upon the ruins of what had once been a fine old plantation manor, a brick house of stately design and spacious proportions, of which only four tall weathered pillars and some jagged sections of wall remained. There are many such ruins, in various stages of decay, in this region; tragic reminders of the Low Country's wars and of its Golden Days, which its last great war ended—the days when the old planters lived in baronial affluence on their great estates, growing vast crops, hunting the deer, drinking their wine, ruling Carolina, and all but ruling the nation; but these were the first of their kind that I had ever seen and they made a deep impression on my mind. This was once Ralph Izard's mansion. Here he lived like the great country gentleman that he was (you can see his portrait, by Copley, in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston), and here upon one occasion no less a personage than the Marquis de Lafayette was entertained. Now only these ruins remained, neglected and forgotten, hidden in lonely woods, the home of the wild turkey, the lynx, and the deer. It was a place of fascinat-

ing but deeply melancholy memories, a place which told of decay and death and the passing of the Low Country's Heroic Age and of the gay plantation life that was snuffed out forever when Sherman marched to the sea. The somber grotesque Anhinga, circling over the spot, had led me to it.

Those wonderful days of the great plantations before the Civil War are not too far away to be remembered vividly. Many of the old houses, some of them built long before the Revolution, still stand and recall to the wayfarer the brilliance and elegance of that remarkable plantation civilization which flourished in the Low Country for so many years, then suddenly perished at the zenith of its prosperity. Among the negroes you may still find a few old men and women who can tell of the great days which have gone and of which they were a part; but, except by having recourse to musty books, it is hard to go back farther than this into the Low Country's romantic past. Of the legends of an earlier period which have survived among the negroes, most are mere fragments.

Thus some of the old men will tell you that the shouts of the big swamp owls are really the whoops of ghostly Indian hunters following the deer; but they do not know *what* Indians. Not one of all the splendid names of the red warriors of Carolina has come down to them. They have never heard

of Canacaugh the Great Conjurer, Wommony the Prince of St. Ellens, Corane the Raven of Toxawa, Attakullakulla the Most Excellent Little Woodcutter, Owasta the Head Beloved Man, Shadoo the Captain of Edisto, Moytoy of Tellequo Emperor of the Nations, Sinnawa the Hawk's Head Warrior, or Ishiagaska of Pocotaligo, bearer of the Bloody Stick, the emblem of war. Attakullakulla's name in the myth of the big swamp owls would make it a myth worth while; but, as the negroes tell it, it is never Attakullakulla who is hunting and whooping in the night but merely "Injuns," nameless red men, impersonal and therefore rather unreal.

Yet one would think that some trace, some memory or legend of the Most Excellent Little Woodcutter (or Little Carpenter, as he was generally known), might have remained among the dusky people who have supplanted the copper-colored owners of this region. He was the greatest of all the red chiefs and, hill man though he was, he has left his trail in the Low Country and in old Charles Town. There he was seen many times in paint and feathers, going to and from the council chamber or dancing the Eagle-Trail Dance before His Excellency Lord Charles Montagu, by whom he was received in audience with his colleagues, the Raven of Tugaloo, Tiftoe of Keowee, Oconostota,

known as the Great Warrior, and the Prince of Chote. At first a minor chief of the Cherokees—that mighty nation of tall braves who, long before the arrival of the whites, had come out of the West to Carolina and exterminated a “moon-eyed people” whom they found living there—Attakullakulla, despite his dwarfish stature, became the most influential leader of the tribe. Though he was not above getting gloriously drunk upon at least one notable occasion—for which escapade his tribesmen “stripped and dry-scratched him with snakes’ teeth to remind him of his bad conduct and make his blood good”—he was capable of noble enthusiasms. One might search the Indian annals in vain for anything finer than Attakullakulla’s rescue, at risk of his own life, of Captain John Stuart, who was spirited out of the Cherokee camp by his old Indian friend and hunting companion and delivered safe and sound to his fellow countrymen after a perilous journey of nine days through the wilderness.

I have hunted, from time to time, for Indian lore among the Low Country negroes but with ill success; and, because pirates appeal to me even more than Indians, I have hunted for pirate lore also, with less hope and with even poorer results. But a poet friend of mine may possibly have found in the negro habit of making Indian ghosts out of owls an inspiration leading to a pleasing pirate

fancy. The ornithologist will smile at finding his familiar *Rynchops nigra*, the skimmer, translated to the realm of the supernatural. But poets sometimes know more than ornithologists about birds; and this poet has discovered, in the occult way in which poets make their discoveries, that the beautiful long-winged skimmers of these shores are not ordinary birds but the spirits of high-born ladies captured long ago by pirates off this coast and compelled by the fierce buccaneers to walk the plank into the sea.

The sea took them, ending their torture, but before long it gave them up. Assuming the form of slender and graceful sea birds, they winged their way back to the land, and you can hear them now crying plaintively in the dusk as they fly restlessly back and forth along the beaches of the barrier islands. There they must meet at times the ghosts of their murderers; for it is as certain as anything of the sort can be that the pirates also haunt these beaches and inlets and walk at night amid the sand hills of the islands which knew them so well in bygone years, and which still hide under their shifting dunes the chests of Spanish coin that the buccaneers are said to have buried.

Once there was wrecked on this coast a pirate vessel whose crew made their way into Charles Town and, swaggering about the streets, boasted

that they had carried the Cross-Bones flag into the Red Sea and had plundered the treasure ships of the Great Mogul. The corsairs were free spenders, and the thrifty shopkeepers had no objection to taking the Great Mogul's gold in exchange for their goods. They made their picturesque and open-handed visitors welcome. But later, when Charles Town had become a thriving seaport with merchantmen of its own, the colonists found that the freebooters who had their lairs in the inlets up and down the coast could not be relied upon to confine their attention to the ships of the Great Mogul and the King of Spain.

Then began the war between the Colony and the sea rovers, a war which lasted for years and during which many thrilling battles were fought and many pirates hung in chains from lofty gibbets on the marshy shore of Shute's Folly, opposite the city. On one occasion the town lay almost under the guns of a pirate fleet commanded by Blackbeard and Stede Bonnet, who blockaded the port, captured many ships, and terrified the community with frightful threats of death to their luckless prisoners, among whom was Samuel Wragg, a member of the Council of the Province. That was the dark hour just before dawn, for shortly afterwards Blackbeard was killed in battle and Bonnet and his crew

were taken and brought as captives to Charles Town.

Bonnet escaped but was captured again in the myrtle thickets of Sullivan's Island, the island which, many years later, Poe celebrated in "The Gold Bug." Tried before the stern judge, Nicholas Trott, the pirate listened, at first with perfect composure, to a carefully detailed description of the horrors of eternal damnation. "Consider," thundered the learned jurist, citing certain Scriptural passages, "that death is not the only punishment due to murderers, for they are threatened to have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone . . . words which carry that terror with them, that, considering your circumstances and your guilt, surely the sound of them must make you tremble, for who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

Bonnet, before he became a pirate, had been a soldier. But the smell of the brimstone was in his nostrils as he heard Trott pronounce his doom, and his spirit broke. He begged pitifully for his life. "I heartily beseech you'll permit me to live," he wrote to Governor Johnson, "and I'll voluntarily put it out of my Power (to return to the ways of piracy) by separating all my Limbs from my Body, only reserving the use of my Tongue to call continually on, and pray to the Lord, my God, and

mourn all my days in Sackcloth and Ashes." His plea, surely one of the most remarkable on record, was fruitless. Not long afterwards he was led, almost insensible with terror, to the place of death where, forty-eight hours before his trial had begun, twenty-two men of his crew had been hanged, and where, a few weeks later, twenty-three buccaneers of Richard Worley's company, captured after a desperate battle just off the harbor mouth, were executed.

If the graceful skimmers, those winged ghosts of "pirate-tortured ladies," were afraid of meeting the ghosts of the buccaneers, they would not fly over Charleston in the dusk, as I have seen them flying, passing over the town from river to river a little southward of St. Michael's steeple. Somewhere between St. Michael's and the Battery, where the city's twin rivers join, stood old Charles Town's Execution Dock, a desolate place of marsh and mud where, in accordance with the old English law, pirates were put to death "within the Ebbing and Flowing of the Sea." The exact spot cannot be fixed with certainty, for the city long ago grew beyond the ancient tide marks; but, as you walk southward from St. Michael's, you pass close by the place.

Was it a mere coincidence that, one evening when I was walking along that way, I heard plaintive cries in the gloom overhead and realized that skim-

mers were flying over? My poet friend had not divulged the secret then, and I did not know that these birds were really the wraiths of beautiful young girls whom the corsairs had captured in the buccaneer days. But now that I know this to be true, I wonder whether it was chance which brought the skimmers there that night to utter their wailing cries in the dusk above the spot where Stede Bonnet and his men, Worley's cutthroats, and many other rovers of lesser note expiated their crimes.

The great difficulty in the Low Country is to confine one's thoughts to the business in hand. We set out to hear dragon music—or, putting it more soberly, to hear alligators bellow—and we have been afloat for an hour on the lagoon where the dragons live. Yet scarcely a thought has been given to the dragons or their music. That is foolish, perhaps, but it will happen to you again and again in this wistfully lovely region which is as full of history and romance as a bit of old England, and yet, far from being a tamed, domesticated country like England, remains to-day one of the greatest strongholds of wild nature east of the Rockies. Wherever one goes in the Low Country—in the woods, on the rivers, amid the marshes and rice fields, on the old baronies and plantations, on the lonely barrier islands, in the towns—one comes upon reminders of a rich, vivid, tragic past. From

Anhingas and alligators one's thoughts wander to Indians and pirates, ladies in gay brocades, old battles, old legends; soon, instead of looking for 'gators, one is likely to be looking for ghosts.

Yet there *is* one 'gator in the tale. The snake-bird had scarcely disappeared when the dragon that we had hoped to hear (or at least to see) came grimly out of the low-hanging mists. So slowly as to make not the slightest ripple on the water, he glided into the open from his hiding place behind a low peninsula of water growths. Perhaps our silence and stillness deceived him. At any rate, instead of sinking noiselessly out of sight, he circled the boat at a distance of not more than fifteen yards—his huge, seemingly shapeless head and fully eight feet of his black, armored back showing above the surface.

I could almost have taken oath that he was more than twelve feet long—a veritable modern Fafnir—and I would have given much to hear him bellow, for he would have made the air shake with his hollow thunder. But as silently as he had come he passed on down the lagoon; and when he had gone, the inner man—which prefers hominy and bacon to 'gators and ghosts—admonished us severely that there had been enough of this philandering on an empty stomach and that fourteen miles lay between us and the breakfast table. Even as

Stede Bonnet, poor devil, had smelled brimstone from the Fiery Lake, we scented bacon across those fourteen miles—but with feelings very different from those of the pirate. Dipping our paddles into the water, we made a quick trip to the shore. Soon we were rattling, in our little horseless gig, along the road that “Mad Archie” traveled in the legend when he drove with his fair and flustered Paulina back to town.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN

IN the beginning she was a sky-girl, the Daughter of the Sun, and she lived in an invisible house at the zenith of the vast blue arch that bends above the world. But that was long ago, the Cherokee wise men say. When the race of man was still young, she became a blood-red bird, a bird which we call the cardinal.

It seems that when she changed her form she changed her sex also, for only the male cardinal is blood-red. He is one of the most famous of all feathered creatures. Volumes have been written about him and poets have celebrated his beauty. One might think that nothing remained to be said. But he has been a very near neighbor of mine for many years, and it would be strange if in all that time he had shown me nothing except the familiar things already set forth in books.

Last summer I watched a nest of young cardinals whose voracious appetites kept the parent birds busily employed. As always, the male did his full share or more than his share in providing food for the young; and I had observed that his favorite

provender for the fledglings was a species of large green larva. All day long he was bringing these big green worms, as we loosely call them, to the nest. He must have found and killed hundreds of them all told; and perhaps he grew a little weary of it at last and began to wish (if birds can wish) that he could find one worm large enough to satisfy his youngsters' appetites for one whole day so that he might rest for a while from his labors.

At any rate, whether or not he entertained this desire or hope, he did find such a worm. This worm was of exactly the same color as the green larvæ upon which he was feeding his offspring; but instead of being a half-inch or an inch in length, it was at least twenty-four inches from nose to tail-tip. As a matter of fact, it was not a worm or larva at all but a keel-scaled green snake of the kind known to naturalists as *Cyclophis*.

Now it is possible that when he attacked and killed this serpent the cardinal was not thinking of his nestlings' Gargantuan appetites. Perhaps he intended to eat the snake himself. The question is unimportant. What interested me was the fact that this cardinal did kill and carry away with him a two-foot snake, a thing which I had never known a cardinal do and which I have never seen recorded in any book. It was not a great feat of arms, for

Cyclophis, one of the gentlest of all the serpent race, is neither venomous nor a powerful constrictor and seldom uses his tiny teeth upon anything larger than a grasshopper. Yet it was a strange and, in a sense, a beautiful sight—the bright red bird glowing in the light like a great drop of blood, while the long, slender, bright green snake writhed and twisted in its captor's bill.

I would have rescued Cyclophis if that had been possible, for he is a destroyer of insects and as harmless as he is graceful. But the cardinal had no intention of parting with his victim. He flew away with it presently, despite the difficulty of carrying so large a prize, and though I watched for him for some time, he did not return to the nest while I was present. Possibly he met with a puzzling or even an insuperable problem when he tried—as I think he did try—to chop the snake into sections small enough for his nestlings to swallow them.

This was, as just now remarked, an instance unique in my experience. Yet it is quite possible that the cardinal dines fairly often upon snake meat, just as he dines now and then upon lizard tails and I suspect occasionally feeds them to his young, though the books say nothing about it. The queer thing about this diet of lizard tails is the fact that in many cases the lizard whose tail has been

devoured goes on living as happily as ever; and this apparent paradox opens the way to an odd and little known chapter of natural history.

One of the most abundant of American lizards is the beautiful *Anolis*, often called the American chameleon because of its habit of changing its color from a brilliant emerald green through various shades of yellow to slaty-gray or dark-brown. These lizards, frequenters of shrubbery and of vine-covered walls and fences where they hunt actively for insects, have various bird-enemies. The loggerhead shrike and the yellow-billed cuckoo are especially adept at capturing them; but the cardinal is not so expert a lizard-hunter, and this lack of expertness is to be noted, since it plays a part in what follows.

It happens that *Anolis* is able upon occasion to divest himself of his tail. Many lizards have this strange faculty in greater or less degree; a very useful faculty, since often it is the means of saving the lizard's life. In *Anolis* the body parts with the tail with a fair degree of facility, though by no means as easily as in some other species. When *Lanius* the shrike, keen-eyed as a hawk and almost as swift in flight, spies a lizard among the vines and drops upon it like a bullet, he generally captures the lizard tail and all. When the yellow-billed cuckoo, slim, agile, noiseless as an owl, spots

a victim on a branch of an elm and glides towards it on velvet wings amid the leaves and twigs, his attack is usually so swift and soundless that *Anolis* is taken completely unawares. But when the cardinal, a rather stocky bird of the seed-eating finch family, turns lizard-hunter, *Anolis* has a better chance for his life and sometimes saves it by the simple expedient of sacrificing his tail.

An incident witnessed not long ago will illustrate what is likely to happen. *Anolis* was overbold that afternoon. In pursuit of a fly or other insect he had left the honeysuckle tangle where he lived and had ventured a yard or so from its shelter out upon the open ground. The male cardinal, busily engaged as usual in seeking food for his nestlings, spied the little reptile and darted towards him at top speed. *Anolis*, himself a pretty speedy racer when speed is necessary, made for a loose slab of stone near by, but the cardinal caught him just before he reached his goal.

There was a brief struggle on the ground, and from where I stood I saw a small elongated thing which, for perhaps two seconds, squirmed and wriggled in a sort of mad dance. The cardinal seemed nonplused. *Anolis* had vanished, and it was plain that he had made his escape under the slab. Just then the cardinal saw me and flew to a mulberry limb overhead. I moved away a little distance and

waited, and presently the bird returned. He hopped about close to the edges of the slab, apparently looking for something; and, after a moment or two, he picked up in his bill an elongated object which squirmed feebly and flew away with it in the direction of his nest.

It was Anolis's tail. In the struggle the lizard had evidently cast off its caudal appendage, by which, in all likelihood, the bird had grasped it, and had saved its life by leaving its tail to the enemy. If its assailant had been a shrike, there would have been no struggle, no casting off of the tail, for the shrike's swifter flight, more trenchant bill and superior expertness in the art of lizard-killing would have disposed of poor Anolis in the twinkling of an eye. The cardinal, however, not a specialist in this sort of hunting, made rather a bungling job of it. Hence Anolis was able to avoid the coup de grace and got away by abandoning a portion of his person which he could easily do without.

And that, I think, is how it happens that baby cardinals occasionally find a lizard-tail without any lizard attached to it on their bill of fare.

All this has to do with the cardinal's habits, his feeding habits in particular. At the same time, these incidents help to illustrate his personality. They reveal the cardinal as by no means a creature

of routine like so many members of the finch family. They show him getting out of the rut occasionally and doing surprising things. Nor is this to be wondered at if we bear in mind the fact that, according to certain copper-colored sages who were considered wise before the white man brought his canny, practical wisdom to these shores, the cardinal is no ordinary bird—that he (or, rather, she, for we must change the sex) once lived in another form at the zenith of the sky and was the lovely Daughter of the Sun.

That was in an evil time, a time when the Sun hated the people of the earth and tried to kill them, sending down such dreadful heat that the people died in hundreds. The Little Men, who lived above the blue arch of the heavens, were friends of the human race. They changed a man into a rattlesnake and sent him to watch near the house of the Daughter of the Sun in the middle of the sky directly above the earth, hoping that when the Sun stopped there to visit the sky-girl, the rattlesnake's fangs might do their work. But the rattlesnake was in too great a hurry to return to the earth and in his haste he chose the wrong victim. When the Sun's daughter opened the door of her house to make the Sun welcome, the great serpent struck her and she fell dead instantly.

The Sun went into the house and mourned and

would not come out again; and the people of the earth found that the darkness in which they now lived was worse than the heat which had formerly oppressed them. So they prayed to the Little Men who lived above the lofty arch of the sky; and the Little Men chose seven brave warriors and sent them on a long journey to the Darkening Land where the dead dwell. These seven warriors found the Sun's daughter dancing among the Ghosts, and by means of the Little Men's magic they put her into a box and started homeward with her.

They had not traveled far when the sky-girl began to beg them to open the box and let her out. But the Little Men had warned them against this, and for a long while they gave no heed to her pleadings. At last, when they were very near home, she told them that she was smothering, and they lifted the lid slightly so that she might breathe.

They noticed that a blood-red bird darted past them, and a moment later they heard this bird chirp in a thicket beside the trail. They thought nothing of this at the time and went on their way; but when they reached home and opened the box in the presence of all the chiefs and the priests and the people of all the villages, they found that it was empty. They knew then that the blood-red bird which they had seen was the Sun's daughter.

So it was that the cardinal came down from the

sky to live upon the earth. And because the seven foolish warriors opened the box in which they were bringing the Daughter of the Sun back from the country of the dead, we can never again bring back our friends who have gone to join the spirits in the Darkening Land.

LYNX-HAUNTED WOODS

EARLY one morning a hunter went down to the edge of a swamp in the Carolina Low Country in search of wild turkeys. About fifty yards from the swamp, he found a big log with an oak in front of it and another behind it. Leaning his gun against the log, he sat down with his back against one of the trees to wait for daylight.

At day-clean, as the Low Country negroes term full dawn, he began calling. It was just the hour when the turkeys should be coming down from their roosts in the tall trees to feed, and the hunter yelped several times, then listened eagerly for an answer. Almost at once he heard a faint sound. Something had come out of the strip of reeds along the edge of the swamp about forty yards away. He saw it, or believed that he saw it, for an instant amid the scattered blackjack saplings; but in the dim light this brief uncertain glimpse told him little, and he concluded that it was only a rabbit.

He continued yelping; and listening intently for the reply that he hoped to hear, he heard the rabbit

come a few feet nearer. Thinking only of turkeys, he did not realize, until the intruder was within eight feet of him on the other side of the log, that rabbits do not ordinarily behave as this animal was behaving.

The hunter was still sitting on the ground, his feet against the log, his knees drawn up under his chin. He leaned to his left to look over the log and behind the oak just beyond it, at the same time extending his arm toward his gun. He gazed straight into the eyes of a bay lynx, or wildcat.

For two seconds neither man nor wildcat moved. Then the man, still sitting, seized his gun and tried to tip the barrel over the log for an arm's-length shot.

Instantly the lynx sprang, launching itself at the hunter's throat. The man jerked his head and body aside and threw up his arm to ward off the blow. The leaping cat passed between the hunter's face and the gun held in his right hand, slashing the man's thumb and knuckles, and made off into the woods at top speed, its flight hastened by the load of turkey shot that went crashing after it. The encounter was merely a remarkable instance of mistaken identity. But, although the hunter did not look at it in just that light, it was, too, an illustration of the wild charm of lynx-haunted woods, where in any green bay or dense thicket the most

mysterious and elusive of all the four-footed wild creatures may be lurking.

In this sense, all these woods of the Low Country are lynx-haunted. Not that at any moment in these woods one is likely to have a wildcat adventure as exciting as that which befell the turkey hunter. There is not by any means a lynx in every thicket; the point is that in almost any thicket there may be one. Not so clever as the fox, the wildcat—or bobcat, as he is known in the West, though bay lynx is his proper and much better name—makes up in mystery what he lacks in personality. Even in places where he is most abundant he is very seldom seen—so seldom that to most people the animal is little more than a myth, a phantom denizen of the mystical, moss-tapestried swamp forests, a legend rather than a reality. Preëminently a creature of the night, he never shows himself to man if he can avoid it; and when he does show himself, he can appear and disappear so swiftly, so soundlessly, that there seems to be magic in it. He is thus, in a sense, the wildest of all the wild inhabitants of the plantation region; and the Low Country woods and swamps owe something of their allurements to the fact that almost anywhere in them this little kinsman of the tiger may be watching you or listening to your footfalls as you pass by.

The thought that a fierce-eyed, silent, hungry

watcher, a hater of mankind, may have you under his gaze need inspire no nervousness in anyone who knows the creature. Nothing on earth could have made that lynx of the Low Country stalk the turkey hunter if the animal had suspected that the sounds issuing from behind the log came from a man and not from a turkey. Yet arrant coward though the wildcat is, even the oldest woodsman finds something both sinister and uncanny in this invisible, almost intangible presence which glides along the dim forest paths on padded feet and prowls about the plantation outhouses in the darkness, unknown and unrecorded, unless some turkey, goose or pig is missing in the morning and certain rounded tracks in the sand reveal the nature of the marauder.

On a dim, shadowy night some years ago, at Magnolia on the Ashley—once one of the finest of the old plantations and now a wonderland of azaleas—a long, slim, slinking shape stole out of the woods and passed swiftly across an open space near an outbuilding. It made for a large leaning mulberry tree and ran rapidly and with perfect ease up the stout trunk. At a height of about twenty feet it fastened itself upon a sleeping hen turkey, leaped or fell with the turkey to the ground, and, somewhat less swiftly than it had come—for the turkey weighed nearly ten pounds—passed like a

ghost across the clearing and vanished in the blackness of the woods.

Several nights later this same long, slinking shape came stealing through the forest near the river. Presently it stopped. Ahead of it in the darkness it saw something that was not there when last it had passed that way. Probably it reconnoitered the strange object with great care, but did not find it sufficiently formidable to excite serious alarm. Soon the dim shape moved forward again. It had a special reason for desiring to reach a certain spot within a few feet of this strange object, which resembled a square wooden box about a foot and a half high. So the dim shape drew nearer and nearer, probably by a more or less circuitous route, and certainly keeping a watchful eye on the boxlike object all the while; and suddenly, when it had come almost within leaping distance of the object, something snapped, and one of the largest bay lynxes that ever roamed the woods of the Low Country was caught by the foot in a steel trap.

Early next morning some of the negroes at Magnolia, coming to examine the traps, found the captive. He had returned, as they had believed that he would, to the place where he had buried the carcass of the turkey, after eating as much of it as he could hold. They had concealed their traps about the place, and in the midst of them, near the spot

where the half-eaten body of the turkey was buried, they had placed a live rooster in a slatted coop, hoping that the crowing of the rooster would hasten the raider's coming.

They spent little time wondering whether it was the rooster or the turkey which was chiefly responsible for the lynx's predicament. What interested them at the moment was the amazing size of the creature; and so forbidding was his aspect, and so ferocious were his deep growls and snarls, that, although he was evidently held securely by the trap, none of the negroes would go near him. After some moments one of them picked up a stick and threw it at the animal. The wildcat, apparently holding the rooster responsible for this assault, sprang furiously at the coop and smote so fiercely with his paw as to smash one of the slats and rake the terrified bird with his long claws. A little later the cat's career was ended with a bullet. His skin was brought to the city by the owner of Magnolia. The negroes pronounced the rest of him delicious.

This wildcat of Magnolia, which came to his death on the morning of October 10, 1921, deserves some special notice. He was not weighed and his measurements were not properly taken; but though he was probably not a record breaker, he was an extraordinary specimen of his kind. Experienced hunters who saw his skin estimated his weight

at between sixty and seventy pounds; and though their estimates were certainly excessive, they may not have been so wildly extravagant as many will be inclined to suppose. Naturalists of the North and East will smile at those figures; but the fact is that naturalists of the North and East do not know much about Low Country wildcats.

Here undoubtedly the animal attains a size far in excess of Northern and Western averages. Dr. William T. Hornaday, director of the New York Zoölogical Park, certainly a first-rate authority, says:

"The largest specimen that ever came into my hands weighed eighteen pounds"—this figure is so small that one wonders whether it is not a misprint. "The largest of nine specimens killed by Mr. Roosevelt's party in Routt County, Colorado, in 1901, weighed thirty-nine pounds. One killed near Asheville, North Carolina, in 1900 is reported to have weighed fifty-one pounds."

The Low Country can beat the best of these, even the Asheville record, which Doctor Hornaday evidently regards with doubt. In November, 1900, Ferdinand Gregorie, a planter, killed at Grog Pond, near Oakland plantation, a male bay lynx which tipped the scales at a trifle more than fifty-one pounds. This monarch of wildcats was weighed

by Arthur T. Wayne, an ornithologist of national note, whose testimony will be accepted by scientific men everywhere. It was the largest lynx of which there is authentic record in this region; yet thirty-pounders are not very rare here, and it is easily possible that an even bigger wildcat than that Oakland monster is lurking now in some Low Country swamp.

To the many swamps, which afford excellent cover and safe refuge for the rearing of the three or four kittens which the female brings forth each year, and to the abundance of the wild life on which he subsists—mainly rabbits and other rodents and many sorts of birds—the bay lynx owes his survival in such large numbers in the Low Country. In some respects the coming of civilization has actually favored him. The puma and the great packs of wolves which formerly ranged through these forests have gone, and though man is a far more dangerous enemy to the wildcat than these former masters of the wilderness ever were, their elimination is one thing for which the lynx must thank his most hated foe.

There are other man-made compensations besides this one to console the lynx for the passing of the halcyon days of the Low Country's early youth. He is quite as fond of quail as he is of turkey as an article of food; and though there are fewer turkeys

now than in the Indians' time, there are probably more bobwhites. It seems likely that the bobwhite was a comparatively rare bird in the primeval forests, and that it followed the white man and throve upon his handiwork, instead of withdrawing before him. The call of the partridge, like the hum of the bee, says one of the old historians, was a signal to the Indians of coming white men and the approach of civilization. It was, too, a signal to the lynxes of those times, though they could hardly have known it, of the coming of a new and succulent species of prey, destined to take the place, in large measure, of the wild turkey, which seems to have been those early lynxes' favorite form of provender.

The bay lynx has to work harder now for a turkey dinner than the lynxes of the early days; yet such a dinner may be had, and is probably often had, in the seclusion of the canebrakes and thickets where no hound or hunter is likely to interrupt the feast. The wild turkey survives in fair numbers in the Low Country. I heard the other day of a man who had recently counted more than forty of these splendid birds in one old field, and it is not a very unusual experience to flush them as one drives along the less frequented woods roads.

To see the great gobblers, tall and slender of build, their heads held high, their bronze bodies glinting in the light, striding through the open

woods of the pineland at the moment before they take flight, and then to watch them sailing swiftly away amid the trees, rising higher and higher until they have topped the feathery summits of the pines, is to enjoy one of the most thrilling spectacles which the Low Country woods afford and to receive a vivid reminder of the old days when all the woodlands swarmed with turkeys.

"Having rested very well during the night," wrote William Bartram, the botanist, describing his journey through Carolina about a century and a half ago, "I was awakened in the morning early by the cheerful converse of the wild turkey cocks saluting one another from the sun-brightened tops of the lofty cypresses. They begin at early dawn and continue until sunrise, from March until the last of April. The high forests ring with the noise, like the crowing of the domestic cock, of these social sentinels; the watchword being caught and repeated from one to another for hundreds of miles around; in so much that the whole country is, for an hour or more, in an universal shout. A little after sunrise they quit the trees, and alighting on the earth, strut and dance around the coy female, while the deep forests seem to tremble with the shrill noise."

What marvelous turkey feasts the lynxes of that period must have enjoyed, following the great flocks

as they roamed through the vast forest that stretched from the ocean to the prairies, and scarcely ever out of sight, sound or scent of turkeys from one day's end to another!

Those days have gone, but something of them remains. The bay lynx is one reminder of them and the wild turkey another, though the fear of man has settled over the woods, so that the amorous gobblers no longer welcome the dawn with so cheerful a clamor. Yet to-day, just as in the early days, these two hereditary foes often match wits in the woods; and sometimes the turkey, in spite of the amazing keenness of his senses, is the loser in the deadly game. Few and far between are the human hunters who can walk or crawl up to a gobbler feeding on the ground; but the soft-footed, serpentlike lynx—serpentlike in his sinuousness and slender symmetry and in his possession of the same sinister craft and cunning which, rightly or wrongly, we attribute to the serpent—is a still-hunter and stalker whose skill even the most practiced of two-legged woodsmen can never hope to approach.

Not only the turkeys but the deer also fear him. Perhaps the first explorers overdrew their spirited accounts of wildcats riding through the woods on the backs of full-grown deer and sucking the blood of their victims while they were yet in the throes of death; but there can be little doubt that the wild-

cat was a destructive enemy of the deer when the latter grazed in hundreds in all the forests, just as there is no doubt that the wildcats of to-day sometimes dine on venison. As a rule only young fawns are taken. As a matter of fact, an adult buck, unless the lynx could contrive to drop upon him from some overhanging bough, would be more than a match for any wildcat. Only the other day, however, a negro woodsman came upon the body of a yearling deer which had just been killed by three wildcats, seen close by the carcass.

A friend of mine who is a mighty deer hunter captured a young fawn in the woods some time ago and reared it in a small enclosure in his yard. The fawn became very tame, and being admitted often to the house, made itself almost a nuisance by its importunate and incessant desire for tidbits of various kinds, accepting eagerly whatever was given it, including even shrimps and cigarette stumps. Of only one thing was it afraid. If a cat came anywhere near it, it was seized with a paroxysm of terror, and sometimes its frenzied efforts to flee were so violent that its owner feared it would break its neck.

This fawn, having been taken so young, within a few hours after birth, could hardly have had any actual experience of wildcats, and during its life in captivity no domestic cat had ever made an at-

tack upon it. Its fear must have been purely instinctive, the result of long centuries of warfare between the bay lynx and the white-tailed deer in the Low Country woods; and it is interesting to note that this instinct, based upon the bobtailed tawny lynx, was aroused so swiftly and powerfully by the long-tailed, variously colored and much smaller cousins of the lynx, which roam our fences at night and occasionally make a pretense of paying their board by catching a few mice for their owners.

It is possible that two hundred and fifty years ago the wildcat was not so desperately afraid of man as it is to-day. The twentieth-century wildcat, which has to deal with shotguns instead of bows and arrows, has learned wisdom. I know of only one instance in which a bay lynx has deliberately attacked a human being in this region, and in that case the victim was a very small negro boy. To-day, when a wildcat is started by the dogs in the course of a deer hunt, the hunter is in less danger from the cat than from the deer, for there have been cases in which a hunted buck has charged a hunter.

For the dogs, however, the cat may prove an exciting customer, at least in those instances when it is brought to bay before it has an opportunity to climb a tree. Coward though it is, the lynx will fight hard for its life when the hounds close in for the death grapple, and its fangs are long and keen

and its claws as sharp as needles; but it will not fight the pack, or even one dog of the pack, so long as there is any possibility of escape by flight or concealment. One startling exception to this rule is an incident related by William Elliott, most famous of Low Country sportsmen, who hunted these woods and fished these waters some three-quarters of a century ago.

"A full-grown wildcat," says Elliott, "will sometimes succeed in beating off a half dozen dogs; though I once owned a noble hound that would kill a cat single-handed. I was witness to such an exciting contest. I was hunting cats with my two well-trained cat hounds, Rowser and Black, and had given the cat a chase of a couple of hours, when, Black having been thrown out, Rowser brought the chase to bay in a hedge. Seeing but one dog in pursuit, he determined to give battle, and after a growl of defiance, left the cover of the hedge and leaped out into an open field. Rowser sprang after him, and the cat, instead of flying, threw himself upon his back, raised his head and extended his forepaws in the attitude of a pugilist on guard. The dog approached—his hair bristling upon his back—and stood almost over his recumbent foe. There was a pause of several seconds, during which they glared at each other with inconceivable fury, before they closed in the death struggle.

"The dog seized the cat on its breast, between the forelegs, the cat at the same time burying its fangs in the shoulder of the dog. Though bitten through and through he uttered no cry of pain, but pressed down upon the cat—nor relaxed his hold until his foe was dead. He killed him by dint of pressure, for his teeth had never entered the skin of the cat—nor have I ever witnessed an instance in which, when killed by dogs, their skins have been torn by their teeth. When the cat was dead his fangs still remained clinched in the shoulder of the dog; his jaws had to be separated by force, and the victor, released from his grip, was unable to move, and was taken home on the back of a horse. I need hardly add that I never suffered this gallant hound a second time to engage single-handed in so serious a conflict."

I have come upon one other remarkable instance, which, though it is less noteworthy than Elliott's, should perhaps be mentioned here. Some years ago, at Old Town Plantation—historic ground, because it was there that the first Charleston stood—two boys about twelve or fourteen years of age were hunting rabbits, with a little mongrel as their assistant, on a wooded point of land extending into the marsh. Suddenly they heard the dog yelling in pain and terror. Hastening to the spot, they found

that a big wildcat had him on his back and was mauling him unmercifully.

The boys were too small and inexperienced to be trusted with shotguns and their only weapons were stout sticks. They were not wanting in pluck, however, and they rushed instantly to the rescue, delivering such telling blows upon the lynx that they first stunned and then killed it. This incident, so contrary to lynx nature, is difficult to explain. Possibly the cat had young ones near by. Possibly—though this seems unlikely—the dog had cornered it and it was compelled to assume the offensive in order to make its way out. Be that as it may, the two boys who killed it with their crude weapons were among the proudest youngsters in America—almost as proud as a small friend of mine of about their age who, some years ago, killed a bear.

In this episode of the Old Town lynx the dog which figured in the affray was a very small one. One hears tales from time to time of battles in which some lone hound, ranging the woods in the night, was severely handled by a wildcat, but very few of these stories are worthy of credence. I happened the other day upon an instance in which the honors rested with the dog, though he deserved little credit for it.

I had gone before dawn to the cabin of a cer-

tain negro hunter of my acquaintance to pay an early morning visit to a flock of wild turkeys whose feeding ground we had discovered. The big, splendid birds, viewed in the first faint light of day under the great pines at the swamp's edge, would be a sight worth while; and we felt fairly confident of finding them, for the many fresh "scratches" amid the dead leaves and pine needles proved that they fed there pretty regularly. Moreover, I liked the place for other reasons also, since the trail to the turkey woods led, with many turns and windings, through a swampy country full of dark ponds and pools where otters lived, while we never failed to find along the way tracks of deer and many signs of lynxes. My dusky woodsman was ready; and as we made our way in the darkness through the woods, he explained to me why he was in such high spirits.

For a month or more a wildcat had been raiding his chickens. He had set traps, and at last, after much scheming, had outwitted the robber. The cat, however, had contrived to jerk the trap loose from its moorings and had dragged it off into the woods, and, although the hunter and his dog had worked hard on the trail they had failed to run down the quarry. All this had happened two weeks before, and the hunter had dismissed the lynx from his mind; but only two or three hours before I had

arrived, the dog—a lanky black and white mongrel with some hound in him—had come upon the animal in the bed of a small stream in the woods, and had closed with it and killed it. This was no great feat, for the lynx was so emaciated that it could offer only feeble resistance. The left forefoot, by which the trap had caught it, had rotted off or had been bitten off, and the lynx, unable to kill enough food to support life, was perishing of hunger.

One day last fall I walked a lonely path which I call Lynx Lane. It was a cold, clear, autumn morning. The thought of work in a stuffy study was repugnant and by ten o'clock had become intolerable. By eleven we had left the city some fifteen miles behind us and stood in the midst of that varicolored glory—crimson and gold and coppery-bronze—which November spreads wherever young sweet gums mass themselves along the borders of small swamps. The path which would take us to Lynx Lane led straight through such a thicket; but at the swamp's edge we paused to have a look at a certain bare space of sand which I never pass without examination.

That spot is an unfailing treasure house of thrills; mild thrills, but pleasant nevertheless. Aside from a few small finches, we are likely to see no living thing there, for cover is lacking; but always we find in the clean sand a fascinating record of wild

things that passed in the night. We found trails of deer, apparently seven or eight, ranging all the way from the delicate impression of a fawn's tiny foot to the deep, bold, strong, yet graceful track of a splendid buck; and as a fitting prelude to a walk along Lynx Lane, we found amid the deer tracks the rounded print of a wildcat's paw.

It was what I was looking for and we passed on, through the gold and crimson and coppery glory of the sweet-gum thicket, across the small stream flowing through the swamp, and so with cautious, deliberate steps to the remote woodland spot where the swamp path joins Lynx Lane. It was well that we had come noiselessly. Around the corner, hidden from us until that moment by the low, dense undergrowth, three wild turkeys, at least two of which were big gobblers, stood not forty feet away in the narrow path, their burnished plumage glowing in the sun. In that wild, secluded place, in that rich setting of gorgeously painted foliage, they were a sight never to be forgotten, as we gazed for a brief instant, rapt and motionless.

The wonderful moment passed, to be succeeded by another not less memorable. As though powerful steel springs propelled them, they shot upward—up and up and up, with strong, surging strokes of their wide wings—until they topped the trees bordering the trail. Some hunters say that a turkey must

run a considerable distance before rising; and I know of one hunter, who, flushing a wild turkey in a woods road closely hemmed in by trees, spurred his horse and, riding madly, actually snatched the flying bird out of the air, the turkey being unable to rise swiftly because the impetus of its start was insufficient.

But these gobblers of Lynx Lane needed no running start. Possibly they took two steps before rising. Then they simply catapulted upward. They had been facing towards us and took no time to turn; hence, if they were not to fly over us, they had to mount very sharply and wheel in the air. They flew not straight up, of course, but at so steep a grade that their ascent was almost rocket-like. I have some fine memories of wild turkeys, some spirited mind pictures of noble gobblers seen in the woods. But those rocketing turkey cocks of Lynx Lane make the finest picture of all.

A good beginning, indeed, for a walk along Lynx Lane; and in high spirits we followed that tunnel-like trail for five miles or so through wild swamp woods full of life and full of mystery. Yet, except birds of various common kinds, we saw scarcely a living thing. Again and again, in dozens or even scores of places, we found evidences of the unseen life that was all around us—tracks and sign of deer, of raccoon, of otter, and of wildcat. At least twenty

times in those five miles we found wildcat sign. In one spot four or five wildcats had paused on the same log, and none of the sign was more than two nights old; but all day long we saw not a wildcat.

That is generally the way of it in lynx-haunted woods—in these woods of Lynx Lane and in all other woods that are inhabited by bay lynxes. Other good things you may see—a big buck, a raccoon, a log cock, a rare warbler, perhaps three splendid bronze wild turkeys; but ninety-nine times out of a hundred you will look in vain for *Lynx ruffus*, as the naturalists call him. At last, after long seeking, a lucky, wholly unexpected glimpse, a glimpse so brief that you can scarcely be sure of what you saw—this is the utmost you can hope for; and months may pass before this meager reward is repeated.

Yet his tracks and his sign show that he is still with us, that he walks familiarly at night where we walk in the day; and here in the Low Country the proofs of his presence are so numerous that he will surely be with us for a long while to come. Perhaps it is just as well that we see him so seldom in the woods or on the trails. The mere possibility of meeting him in some green solitary place is precious; but if we met him often, the mystery which is his principal charm would vanish.

THE BROAD BLUE ROAD

ONE autumn day, lying more than half-asleep on the slope of a sand dune between the ocean beach and a broad expanse of marsh, I heard or seemed to hear, very faintly, a sound of wings. I opened my eyes upon a sight which in an instant cleared my brain of all its languid drowsiness. Straight above me and not more than twenty yards overhead, a great wood ibis hung almost motionless in the air, its long legs dangling, its wide, white, black-edged pinions rigidly extended.

At that close range and viewed from directly beneath, the big bird, stretching nearly six feet from tip to tip of its wings, seemed even larger than it really was. To me at that moment of awakening it appeared too large and too fantastic to be real—a visitor from some unknown country of the upper air rather than an inhabitant of our own familiar world. I could see every detail of its pattern and form; the long, curved, heavy bill; the dark, naked, elongated head, tinged with pale-yellow and turned a little to the left; the blue-black legs

and feet, hanging low as though the bird were about to alight. To that long bill and head and outstretched neck and to the slender, loosely-dangling legs its outlandish quality was due. Its beauty lay in the ample spread of the white wings, bordered throughout their length with glossy bluish-black, and in its superb stateliness and cloud-like buoyancy.

For an instant, I gazed, wide-eyed and half-incredulous, at this strange denizen of the sky spaces, which had come apparently to investigate me as I dozed on the slope of the dune. Then, not realizing what I did, I moved my hand slightly to pull my hat forward a little so that it might shade my eyes.

The movement brought an end. At once the wide wings above me, as though suddenly endued with life, swished powerfully through the eddying air; the dangling legs were drawn up under the short tail and thrust backward like a rudder; the long neck straightened and reached forward as though pulling the bird after it. Again I heard, but far more plainly now, that sound of mighty pinions which had aroused me. Higher and higher the great bird rose, its strong wings lifting it lightly and swiftly—up and up and up, climbing in a spiral course to a great height, then sailing on extended pinions toward the west. Within five minutes my

visitor from the skies was only a speck above the wide, green marshes stretching for miles beyond the sands.

Now it happened that all that morning I had been roaming the dunes with my eyes upon the ground. I had been searching for tracks in the sands, and I had found many of them, chiefly the tracks of raccoons and of minks. For hours I had followed these winding trails around the slopes of the sandhills and along the little valleys amid the dunes, hoping to read in them some of the secrets of the wild folk that had made them. I had worked out a few such secrets, I thought—small secrets, yet not without interest because to me, at least, they were new—and I had intended to continue these studies in the sands after the little nap which I took about noon.

It was the ibis, appearing so suddenly and unexpectedly above me at the moment of awakening, that changed my plans and lifted my eyes from the ground for the rest of that day.

For some minutes after the big bird had gone I still lay upon my back, staring straight upward, full of that exaltation which comes to the lover of wild things when he has seen a sight at once sublimely wild and indescribably beautiful. Gazing thus at the blue void overhead, I realized all at once that I had been wasting my time that morning.

Into my field of vision swept suddenly a vast host of birds flying so high that they were mere specks against the blue. What they were I could not tell, for they were too far above me, but they seemed to be of about the size of blackbirds, and they were flying southwestward not in a compact flock, but in wide, uneven ranks which extended to right and left as far as my eye could see. They had scarcely passed when, at an even greater height, twelve long-necked, long-legged birds, whose broad pinions smote the air slowly and rhythmically, sailed into view. They flew one behind the other in a line as straight as an arrow, and I knew at once what they were—great blue herons migrating by day instead of by night, and flying higher than I had ever seen herons fly before. After they had passed, the sky was empty for a little while. Then came another great flock like the one which had preceded the herons, myriads of black moving specks dotting the heavens overhead and far to the right and to the left.

These, too, sped swiftly on, but only for a few minutes was the sky vacant. From the marshes beyond the dunes a marsh harrier had circled upward to soar for a while on motionless pinions in the high air. When he was almost directly over me he ceased his serene circling and began to swoop and swerve here and there with frenzied energy. Strain-

ing my eyes, I discovered presently the reason for his erratic aerial maneuvering.

Another army of small birds was streaming past at so lofty an altitude that they were all but invisible, and the soaring marsh hawk had found himself suddenly encompassed by this feathered host. For a moment I thought it possible that the hawk was raiding the passing army and was making a mighty slaughter in its ranks, but soon I concluded that the opposite was true and that the little birds were the aggressors. I judged then that they were kingbirds gathered together in a great flock for the long autumn journey to their tropical winter home and gleefully seizing this opportunity to thrash one of their hereditary enemies on the way.

The marsh hawk took his thrashing as best he could, and resumed his placid circling when his tormentors had passed on; and I, still lying on the dune, watched the air spaces for a long while that afternoon and saw many feathered wayfarers pass at various altitudes along the blue road of the sky. For the rest of that day, thanks to the ibis which had lifted my eyes to the heavens, the winding trails of the furry wild folk of the dunes were forgotten. I could study those trails whenever I wished to do so, for, now that autumn had come, the furtive people of the seaside marshes would roam widely over the sands at night. But this was one of those days

when the broad blue road which stretches above the world from the polar wastes to the equator was thronged with travelers—one of those early autumn days which set the feathered armies on the march.

The first cool wave of the year had been reported from the northward. During the previous night the temperature had dropped some ten degrees. From the forests of Ontario, from the barrens of Labrador and the windy plains of the Arctic Circle, the winged hosts were streaming southward. It was time to watch the highway of the sky.

It is a marvelous highway indeed; more wonderful, I think, than any road that man has made. Year after year, for centuries without number, it has been traveled by untold myriads of living things of many kinds; by armies whose thousands dwarf the armies of the nations; by great white swans and tiny hummingbirds; by the long wedges of the geese and by legions of ducks; by phalaropes and godwits and pelicans and stately herons; by strange, little-known creatures of the wilds like anhingas and ibises; and by those familiar neighbors of orchard and meadow, such as the robin and the bobolink and the swallow, which are so well known to us that we accept them as among the commonplaces of life.

We think of the air as an empty, uncharted space across which, in every direction, birds pass from time to time, following no set course, but flying

north, south, east or west as suits their purpose. But twice each year, in spring and fall, the air becomes a great thoroughfare running generally north and south, along which the birds move northward or southward, according to the season, sometimes for thousands of miles, in fulfillment of that strange instinct of migration which is one of the major miracles of nature. For many years man has tried to understand that miracle, to determine how it is performed and to discover the causes of this astonishing semi-annual hegira of the feathered tribes from the tropics to the polar region and back again. He has not solved the problem yet; but in the background of all his speculations regarding it looms the white immensity of that vast continental glacier which long ago crept far down from the Northern Pole like some gigantic, nameless, spectral beast of prey bent upon swallowing the world.

Therein lies one of the chief fascinations of the broad blue road along which, year after year, the migrating myriads pass. Watching the highway of the sky at those seasons when the winged wayfarers are moving, we see not only the passage of those wayfarers. We see also, with that indispensable eye of the mind without which we cannot really see anything, the slow, relentless advance of that huge, shapeless, inanimate Ice Monster many centuries ago. We cannot think about migration, its

causes and beginnings, without thinking also of the Great Ice Age; for whether or not, as some believe, we find in the Glacial Epoch a sufficient explanation of these tremendous periodical waves of feathered life surging northward in spring and southward in fall, there can be no doubt that the coming of that grim, ghostly, white chimera down from the top of the world did have a profound effect upon the movements and distribution of birds as they exist to-day.

As the ice moved farther and farther southward, until all the upper part of the continent as far down as the latitude of New York lay under a frozen sheet perhaps more than a mile in depth, the birds gave way before it, crowding toward the tropics; and when at last, after many fluctuations extending over a long period, the ice sheet slowly withdrew toward the polar regions whence it had come, the birds pushed northward behind it. So much we know; and some men of science hold that out of this retreat and advance of the birds during the Ice Age arose the habit of migration, which, as we see it to-day, is clearly the result of some ancient instinct the cause and origin of which must be sought in an earlier period of the earth's history.

The scientists of this school may be right, or they may be wrong. Probably there were other factors besides this one, other changes and conditions, some of them perhaps antedating the coming of the ice,

which in the course of slow ages helped to develop and fix the habit and instinct of migration. But with these deep and puzzling questions the watcher of the broad blue road need not trouble his brain. It is enough for him that when in his imagination he travels that road backward, he sees presently that nameless Ice Monster looming across his path, white and terrible and incredibly huge; and seeing it there in all its stark immensity, gleaming with dreadful radiance through the mists of the years, he forgets for a little while the familiar present and dwells amid the wonders of the dim past.

Thus this highway of the sky, this broad blue road which the migrating feathered armies have followed for countless springs and countless autumns, is not only a thoroughfare for the birds. It is, too, a road along which a man may travel to strange, forgotten countries, countries which no longer exist under the sun, but have passed away forever in the course of the vast changes that the hoary earth has seen; and to launch himself upon this journey he needs no more than the sight of a robin hurrying southward in the fall or the sound of a bobolink's chirp dropping down through the night. It is the southward movement of the birds in autumn, rather than their northward movement in spring, which thus carries the imagination backward to the Reign of the Ice; for every

fall and winter the Great Ice Age is reproduced faintly and upon a much smaller scale, and there is reenacted before us, in miniature as it were, that colossal drama of the Glacial Epoch.

A strange restlessness stirs in the breasts of the feathered peoples of the Far North. Some, like the ptarmigan and the Canada jay and even the tiny chickadee, are unaffected by it. They have thrown off the old terror of the long-ago, and in them the instinct of migration no longer survives. They will remain where they are, knowing that this enemy which is coming is only winter after all, the softer winter of this modern age, and not that implacable, irresistible Ice Monster of the past. But in thousands of others, as the summer wanes, the urge to move southward waxes more and more insistent, uneasiness grows until often it seems to have in it something of the quality of panic. From their scattered nesting places they gather into flocks often containing thousands of individuals. Then, though food may still be abundant and the temperature still warm, the southward movement begins, and the winged armies start their long journey along the broad blue road.

To watchers by the way, the contrast with the spring migration grows more and more apparent as the season advances. In spring the actual process of migration is in many cases scarcely observable

at all. The migrants, as a rule—though it is a rule to which there are many exceptions—come not in great flocks, but singly or in small companies, and we seldom actually witness their coming. We are aware only that gradually, almost imperceptibly, the woods are being populated again by those birds of the warm weather which have not been seen or heard for months. The familiar comparison with an advancing victorious army is not really accurate. Rather it is like the slow rising of a tide, or like the gradual, peaceful filling up of a new country with settlers coming in by twos and threes or in small groups.

The fall migration is less orderly, less uniform, and therefore more spectacular. A long-continued period of warm weather may dull the migrating instinct temporarily and cause the migrants to linger for days in some favorable region after beginning their journey, new increments from farther north constantly swelling their ranks. Then a sudden cool change intervenes, and they start southward again in vast numbers, many different species often traveling together. Hence it is in autumn, rather than in spring, that the watcher of the broad blue road is likely to witness the most dramatic spectacles. It is after the fall migration is well under way that he becomes most vividly aware of great

aerial armies on the march, of incalculable winged hosts thronging the long air lanes.

Then come those nights when the air is full of bird voices, when from dusk to dawn the calls and cries of passing myriads come raining down through the blackness, some of them deep and wild and strange like the guttural croaks of herons, some of them thin and silvery and pathetically small like the faint chirps of little finches and tiny warblers. These fall nights of many voices are in some respects more impressive than most of the fall days. By day you will not be aware of the passage of the migrating squadrons unless you watch for them, for many of the feathered voyagers who travel between sunrise and sunset generally fly at a considerable height, and most of us are too busy to spend much time gazing upward. Moreover, there are autumn days when the stream of life almost ceases to flow, and the sky lane seems almost empty. But there are other days when the flying regiments come in such swift succession that one has scarcely disappeared before another is in sight; and occasionally you will be treated to some soul-stirring spectacle.

There was an afternoon late last fall when I saw the cavalry of the air sweep past in memorable splendor along the broad blue road. Again on that occasion I was on a lonely sea beach, where, as far as the eye could see, there was no sign of man or

of man's works; and, again it was one of those crystal-clear mornings of almost no wind, when, except for the long white lines of the surf stretching along the strand, even the ocean seemed as still as glass and the vivid blue of the sky was unflecked by a cloud.

Far along the shore to the northward, miles distant up the coast, I had seen from time to time what appeared to be wisps of smoke rising slowly into the air and weaving about like long, dim, gray-blue serpents, then settling slowly down again. I knew what these smoke wisps were—clouds of sea birds congregated on sand banks off the beach and shifting their stations now and then as the advancing tide encroached upon the reefs where they were resting; but I had not at that moment any hope or expectation of the sight which I was soon to enjoy.

At last the smoke wisps rose once more, in greater numbers and to a somewhat greater height than before; first one, then another, then a third, waving and winding and swaying. Then, after a few minutes, they seemed to coalesce and become one, as though a half-dozen smaller serpents had joined to form one greater serpent. This one lay for a while horizontally above the sea—a long, wavy line extending straight out from the shore, now rising, now sinking in slow, graceful, serpentine undula-

tions; and suddenly I realized that it was less vague and smoke-like than it had been at first; that this long, undulating line, stretching from the beach far out over the ocean, was growing sharper and more definite.

I knew then that a great army of sea birds was coming; an army advancing, not in a loose flock as most birds fly, not in a long column or elongated wedge like the armies of the ducks and of the cormorants, but in a wide rank or ranks, the most beautiful and impressive formation ever employed by the tribes of the air. I waited eagerly, expectantly, no longer with the image of a serpent in my mind (for while the line still undulated as it advanced, no serpent travels "broadside on"), but rather thinking of a great host of horsemen riding side by side in a headlong charge across a broad, gently rolling plain.

More and more definite grew the advancing line; longer and longer it appeared as it drew nearer mile after mile, sweeping swiftly down the curving, lonely shore, now rising twenty or thirty feet above the breakers, now sinking to within a yard or so of their curling crests. The shoreward flank of that wide-spread phalanx was directly over the beach; oceanward it extended far beyond the outermost billows of the broad belt of surf; and as the flying host drew swiftly nearer, I saw that these cavalry-

men of the air rode not in one rank, as I had supposed, but in five or six ranks, one rank following another so closely that until they were very near they seemed to be one.

When they were yet a mile or more away, I realized with a little lift of the heart that these birds were what I had hoped they would prove to be. From the first, when they were no more than a wisp of smoke in the distance, I had thought that they were skimmers or scissors-bills. I knew now that they were, beyond a doubt, those most beautiful and most graceful of all the long-winged flyers of the coast which, both in their form and in their habits, are unique among American birds.

I could not yet distinguish the long, thin, scissors-like skimmer bill, bright red at the base and flattened perpendicularly, with the lower mandible much longer than the upper so that its owner may thrust it into the water and, flying swiftly along just above the surface, literally plow the main with the submerged tip of its beak. But already I could see the long, narrow, tapering wings rising and falling with a motion peculiarly their own; and already, when the oncoming phalanx was yet far away, the sharp contrast between the jet-black upper parts of each bird and the snowy breast was clearly discernible.

The last mile was quickly covered. On and on

they swept, nearer and nearer, holding their wide-fronted array with admirable precision, flying at a height of ten or twelve feet above the beach and the surf. I had thought that when they saw us standing there on the strand there might be some confusion in the wide ranks, but there was none. They rose no higher; but as though some swift signal had run along the line from its shoreward end to the other end far out over the sea, the whole great army of them swung, as a unit, and in perfect alignment, a little to the left, so that the extreme right flank of the host swept past us at a distance of some twenty yards.

For an instant, when they were directly opposite us, we looked seaward along what seemed to be an endless lane of birds, their coral bills shining in the sun, their slim bodies now white, now black, as the taper wings rose and fell. Then, in a moment, they were past us, speeding on to the south above the white lines of the surf and the pale green ocean beyond the breakers. Soon they were no more than a thin, horizontal, undulating thread of smoke miles distant along the curving strand.

Such spectacles as that afforded by this great skimmer army are rare even during the fall migration when many sorts of birds which are not especially gregarious at other seasons gather in large flocks. These skimmers were evidently migrating by easy

stages, stopping from time to time on sand-bars close to the beaches and then, when the rising tide covered these resting places, taking to the air again. Doubtless the army grew larger and larger as it proceeded southward, picking up new recruits on the way; and probably nearly all the skimmers which had nested along the Atlantic coast went southward with that host. Above the coastline of the South Atlantic extends one of the greatest air roads of the western hemisphere, a road into which converge many other roads leading from the eastern, northern and central United States and from Canada. By day the line of the coast is a conspicuous guide for the feathered travelers. Perhaps the myriads that travel by night are guided, at least in part, by the sound of the surf along the shore, although those species which regularly every fall traverse hundreds or even thousands of miles of sea need no such guidance.

How they find their way across these wide sea spaces is one of the great mysteries of nature. How can the turnstone lay its course unerringly every year to Hawaii across two thousand miles of ocean? How can the golden plover's small muscles drive it, without one pause for rest, all the way from Nova Scotia to the Antilles? And what strange power prevents the plover armies, when they have embarked on this long sea voyage, from losing them-

selves on the broad Atlantic? How can that jeweled atom, the hummingbird, discover in its tiny wings sufficient strength and endurance for a journey from Florida to Saskatchewan and back again? How can the little blackpoll warbler, when it has nested and reared its young in Alaska, find courage to begin the seven-thousand-mile trip to its winter home in Brazil?

Such instances might be multiplied. The voluminous literature of bird migration is full of them. But this is not a treatise on that great subject, nor is it an attempt to answer questions which have puzzled the wisest men. It is mainly a record of a few small adventures met with by a lover of birds while, by chance or design, he was watching the broad blue road—adventures of a sort which may perhaps interest other bird lovers, to whom each new or unusual or beautiful sight in the bird world is an adventure.

In autumn, when the highway of the sky is thronged with travelers, these adventures are especially likely to befall. The greater part of the bird population of America is on the move then: whether you watch in the deep forest or amid the high mountains or beside the beaches and marshes of the coast or in a city garden, you will see some part of the migrating multitude. It is in the fall, more than at any other time of the year, that you are likely to

encounter strange and unexpected visitors. A sudden windstorm or downpour of rain in the night catches a feathered army on the march. Above the sound of the wind or the rain you hear the shrill cries of the bewildered travelers dropping down from the darkness overhead; and in the morning you will find the trees or the fields alive with birds which were not there before—with gaily colored warblers, some of which may be new to you, or with finches of various kinds, or perhaps with birds seldom seen in the woods or on the uplands, like long-billed marsh wrens or coots or clapper rails.

I remember an autumn morning, following a night of thunder and rain, when I found that a dense thicket of small pines, far from the nearest water, was fairly spangled with prothonotary warblers, preëminently lovers of the swamps. Everywhere the gorgeous, golden birds glittered like jets of flame against the dark-green foliage. There were moments that morning when those straight, conical young pines, clothed in rich verdure from base to summit, resembled Christmas trees decked with many candles.

There was another autumn day when in my city garden I witnessed a somewhat similar effect, though the trees this time were broad-leaved Japanese privets, and the birds were summer warblers. For weeks prior to that day not a summer warbler had been

seen. Then in the night they came down from the north in myriads, flitting unseen through the darkness, above the fields and the forests and the slumbering cities of men; and in the morning I found the garden alive with them, brightened and glorified by their vivid yellow plumes.

Nearly always it is the night which brings these sudden floods of birds appearing in strange places, places where ordinarily they are not likely to be found. Those migrants which travel by day are more fortunate in some respects than their night-flying kinsmen. They can see the approaching squall and can drop down to some safe and suitable place and find refuge there until the storm is over. The night-flyers, however, are often caught in mid-flight by gales or heavy rains; and then apparently they must make forced landings wherever they happen to be, so that sometimes, when daylight shows them where they are, they find themselves in unaccustomed surroundings.

Probably that was how it happened that a friend of mine once found a tall limpkin or courlan walking about in his back yard, while shy water birds, such as at least bitterns and purple gallinules, are sometimes found in city streets. Yet, in spite of the many disadvantages of night-travel, vast numbers of even the smaller and weaker-winged birds travel always by night. Apparently they need all the day-

light hours for procuring food—fuel for the engines encased in their tiny bodies, those marvelous miniature engines upon which they rely to drive them forward through the endless leagues of air.

For a favored few this fuel problem is much simpler. Of all the travelers of the broad blue road, I think the barn swallow is the luckiest, the best equipped for the long journey. Most of the other birds which migrate by day must stop now and then and spend precious hours seeking food; but the barn swallow, once launched upon his southward voyage, can travel from sunrise to sunset every day without once halting to take on fuel for his engine.

He catches his food as he flies, snatching it from the air along his route; and while the same thing is true of all the swallow kind, in none of the others are such swiftness, ease, and elegance of flight combined with such dexterity in the capture of the winged insects upon which the swallows feed. Amid the dunes of the coast, within sight of the surf, I have watched them autumn after autumn. They come not in flocks but singly, flying low, sometimes not more than a foot above the sands, sweeping and swerving with infinite grace in and out among the hillocks. One has scarcely passed on before another is at hand; and from mid-August to mid-October the procession continues, bird following bird, hour after hour, day after day, until sometimes I have

thought that the long, thin line of them must stretch from northern Alaska, where some of them are known to nest, to Argentina and Chile, where they have their winter homes.

It is a far cry from these tireless and expert flyers, whose physical equipment and habit of feeding in the air greatly simplify the problems of their long journey, to the small feathered folk of the warbler tribe whose wings are short and weak and who must search painstakingly for food amid the foliage of trees and shrubbery. In these, even more than in the still smaller hummingbird, the habit of migration assumes the aspect of a miracle; for the hummingbird, small as he is, rejoices in a marvelous pair of wings which can fan the air so rapidly that the human eye cannot follow the whirring movement.

Nature has not blessed the warblers with pinions like the rubythroat's. In general, they spend comparatively little time in the air, using their wings only for short flights from tree to tree or from bough to bough. Yet, when the call comes to them, they, too, mount fearlessly above the tree-tops and turn their slender bills to the south; and, autumn after autumn, those feeble wings bear them on journeys of many hundreds of miles. But, except when there are wide sea areas to be crossed, they do not fly, like their stronger-winged brethren, league after

league without rest or pause. In most cases, theirs is a journey performed in comparatively short flights and by easy stages, a journey broken often by long halts when in some region which suits their fancy they remain for days at a time to rest and feed.

The bird lover may thank his lucky star that this is so. If the warblers were as strong of wing as the barn swallows and passed on as swiftly, many of them would remain unknown to most of us, and autumn in the woods and fields would lose much of its interest and beauty. No small part of the fascination of fall is due to those tiny birds of the warbler family which, at recurring intervals during that season, fairly swarm in the trees—little feathered sprites of brilliant plumage and exquisite form, flashing here and there through the foliage like glowing, living jewels. They are, I think, take them all in all, the best gifts that autumn brings; and although most of them are silent when they come down from the upper North, they are in many cases even more numerous in fall than in spring, since the southward migration brings not only the birds which traveled northward in April and May, but also the thousands of youngsters which in the meantime have come into the world.

Redstart and blackpoll, hooded warbler and prairie warbler, blue-wing and golden-wing, parula

and black-throated blue, chestnut-side and bay-breast, Blackburnian and yellow-throat, golden-cheek and black-throated green, palm warbler and pine warbler, ovenbird and water-thrush, myrtle warbler and caerulean warbler—their very names are full of rainbow-beauty, as colorful and alluring as themselves. As though to atone for their small size and limited powers of expression, nature has bestowed upon them her brightest hues, her most exquisite patterns and designs. Some few are of comparatively sober tint, but there are many that vie with the most brilliant flowers of the field; and while some are so rare that in a lifetime of bird-watching you may never see even one specimen—there are some in that list that I have never seen—others are often so abundant when the migration is at its height that all the woods seem aquiver with tiny pinions.

And there is scarcely one of them that is not from day's end to day's end athrill with the joy of living. Of all the birds that fly, these are assuredly the happiest; for there is no other of the great families of the avian race—not even the family of the wrens—which, as a whole, gives to the bird-watcher so vivid an impression of carefree abandon, of unvarying, everlasting gladness. No wonder that for many of us these feathered fairies of the warbler clan are the most welcome of all the travelers that

follow the broad blue road; for in them as a class are exemplified in superlative measure that beauty and that joyousness, that brilliancy of color and that blitheness of personality, that lightness and airiness of body and of spirit which distinguish birds from all other living things and make them our favorites among all the varied forms and kinds of the animate world.

And yet there are moods which the warblers cannot satisfy; moments when the sprightly, delicate beauty which is their principal charm leaves us cold and unresponsive. More often in fall than at any other season these moods and moments come. To the primal man mere loveliness means less than nothing. He crushes the orchid underfoot and passes the little golden warbler by without a glance. But his heart leaps up at sight of an eagle plunging down from the high air, and the voice of his soul shouts an answer to the trumpeting of the swans.

Perhaps we shall never hear that trumpeting, for the swift-flying armies of the great wild swans are not as numerous as they once were. Probably we shall never again see the long legions of the whooping cranes, or hear the resounding music of their bugles, for their sun is setting fast, if indeed it has not already set. But there is much of wildness still left to us; there are stirring sights still to be seen along the high air lanes.

The squadrons of the geese will go clanging overhead. Mallard and golden-eye, bluebill and pintail, widgeon and gadwall, teal and shoveler, will travel the highway of the sky. The cohorts of the curlew will travel that highway, the black-bellied plover and the yellowlegs, the long-bodied loons cleaving the air like aerial torpedoes, the serpent-like armies of the cormorants, the black regiments of the coots who will discover suddenly that their weak wings are very strong. All these and many more will follow the broad blue road. All these you may see if you will watch that ancient wonderful highway which is more ancient and more wonderful than any of the roads of man.

THE GARDEN NATURALIST

THE sparrows were not themselves that morning. They lacked that air of jaunty, impudent assurance which is their most attractive characteristic. I had noticed the change in their demeanor, and at once I suspected the cause. Yet I was not prepared for so startling and dramatic a manifestation of the peril that hung over them.

It came like a flash, like an arrow shot from the sky, like a bolt of lightning hurled down from the clouds. Within a half-hour there had been a dozen false alarms; but the real danger, when it descended, fell without a moment's warning, unheralded by a shadow, unannounced by a sound.

For thirty minutes or so I had been rather idly watching the English sparrows at their feeding. They were unbidden guests at the feast, but they came in battalions, and because they were so numerous they always got the lion's share. That feast was spread daily in a corner of the garden for the benefit of the whitethroats, cardinals, and brown thrashers. This morning, as usual, there were at

least four English sparrows present for every whitethroat, while the garden cardinals and thrashers had breakfasted briefly and departed about their business. At the moment when the blow fell perhaps ten whitethroats and something like fifty English sparrows were regaling themselves on the chicken feed which I had scattered over the ground.

Watching them lazily from my study window, I had become aware of certain things. The sparrows were afraid of something—something unseen and unheard, but evidently formidable and perhaps imminent. Their fear was evident in their nervousness, their unaccustomed silence, their abnormal alertness. Again and again sudden panic seized them, and they rose with a wild whirring of wings to dart at full speed into the thick cover of the evergreens near by. When these alarms came, every English sparrow sought cover; but the whitethroats, though no larger than their overseas relatives, always took matters calmly and seemed not to be frightened in the least. They would pause for an instant in their feeding and perhaps jump a little to right or left as the English sparrows rose in a tumult of fluttering pinions; but, although watchful, they were not afraid, and even in the most urgent and panicky alarms, few if any of them took the trouble to fly to the shelter of the shrubbery.

Now at this I wondered a little, for I thought

that I knew what the English sparrows feared, and I judged that their fear was well founded. It was probable, I thought, that earlier in the morning they had caught sight of a certain dreaded foeman and knew that he was lurking somewhere near. In fact, their behavior revealed pretty plainly that this foeman had been sighted and that warning of his presence had been spread through the garden; and it seemed to me that the English sparrows were showing more intelligence than the whitethroats, a better understanding of nature and of nature's ways, a superior degree of training in the school of the wild.

Obviously they were awake to the peril and alert to avoid it. They would not be caught napping if the danger descended, while these phlegmatic whitethroats, on the other hand, were apparently ignorant of what the excitement was about and remained calmly in the open, tempting fate. It seemed to me certain that when the enemy came, if he did come, a whitethroat and not an English sparrow would be his victim; and this appeared very strange because these whitethroats were wild birds, birds of the woods and thickets, true children of nature and therefore conversant with her ways, while the English sparrows, on the contrary, were a semi-domesticated folk who dwelt in cities and had little of the wisdom of the wild.

So for a while, as I watched the birds from my study window, my mind played with this minor puzzle, this little problem of bird-life suggested by certain incidents in a corner of the garden. Then, of a sudden, the Terror came.

He came, so it seemed, out of nowhere. He was like a ghost in his silence, like a bullet in his speed. I do not know whether he dropped from the sky directly overhead or shot through some high opening in the trees. But all at once he was there in the thick of them—a keen-winged, long-tailed, slate-gray hawk, hanging for one fraction of an instant motionless in the air outside the study window in the midst of a cloud of sparrows.

He was gone almost as quickly as he had come, and he carried a victim with him in his long, curved talons. It was not a whitethroat, but an English sparrow; for later, in another part of the garden, I found certain tell-tale feathers under a tree where the sharp-shinned hawk, or blue darter as we call him hereabouts, had plucked and eaten his prey. The seemingly stupid whitethroats had known what they were about, after all, and when the crisis came they were ready for it. Here in a little city garden I had learned something—a small thing, yet interesting—about wild life.

There are many such things to be learned in such a place; and one of the first things that the garden

naturalist learns, one of the things that give him most delight, is this: that no matter how small his garden is, no matter how unfavorable its situation, there will be wild life in it. The wild folk will come in spite of everything, in spite of walls and fences and miles of city streets and all the terrifying sounds of the city. Not all of them will come, of course. You will not find a ten-point buck grazing in your city back-yard or a wild gobbler perching in your garden elms. But others will come if you watch for them, and among them will be many that are worth knowing and some that are distinguished.

One gray morning I was watching a small bird in one of my garden trees. It was a very active bird, and it moved about so rapidly from one twig of the elm to another that I could not make out what it was. Ten chances to one, it was only a myrtle warbler, a common winter visitor; but, try as I would, I could not catch a glimpse of the yellow spot on the back which would have settled the question. So from my seat by the high window, almost on a level with the twigs among which it was foraging, I continued to watch it with some interest through the panes; and I was still watching it, still looking for the yellow spot, when a big bird sailed into the square of sky above and beyond the naked branches of the elm.

"A buzzard," I thought, and would have forgotten it instantly had it not turned and soared round and round precisely where I could not help seeing it in the distance against the background of gray sky as I watched the little fellow in the tree. And then suddenly the sun peeped from behind a cloud, and the head and tail of my "buzzard" shone with a snowy whiteness. At once I realized the splendid truth. It was the king of birds, himself!

Now, there were two reasons why that was an event so memorable that every detail of it sticks in my mind to this day. The first reason was the fact that this was the first eagle that I had ever seen, and no lover of wild things ever forgets his first eagle. The second reason was the fact that I saw it not in some wild, remote place, but from my bedroom window in a city; and this fact, which filled me with delight and amazement at the time, was like a key which opened a treasure-chest. It was the sight of this eagle circling above my garden that made me begin to realize for the first time how much of the wild world of nature a man may see from his own doorstep. I had not, up to then, paid much attention to the garden's life. It had not occurred to me that anything really worth while could be found in a little patch of trees and shrubs and grass in the midst of a city; and I always looked forward eagerly each week to Saturday in the country and

counted myself a prisoner until then. It was this eagle that first brought the wilderness to the garden and opened before my eyes the fascinating possibilities of garden natural history.

That was a good many years ago, and since then the lesson which the eagle taught has been repeated many times in many different ways. Charles Kingsley, who could speak with authority about such matters, said that a thoroughly good naturalist was one who knew his own parish thoroughly. In that case, taking Kingsley at his word, there have been few thoroughly good naturalists. A parish is a vast place. It is a whole planet, compared with a garden, and I would take off my hat to any naturalist who could really *know* my garden.

He would have to begin his researches under the soil where earthworms and other burrowing folk live, and he would have to carry his studies up to the top of the tallest elm and far above its highest twigs to "the broad blue lift of the sky," where on summer afternoons the buzzards wheel and soar and sometimes herons, cormorants, loons, and other big feathered voyagers pass on their far journeys. Between these two extremes and within the narrow boundaries of the garden's fences vast populations would claim his attention. Under every brick and stone he would find a summer village. In every hollow tree-trunk he would come upon little peoples

of various kinds. On the bole and amid the leaves of every bush and tree living things of many sorts and sizes and hues would bid him pause and take note of how life is lived in such situations. No matter how zealous and industrious he might be, he could never in a single life learn half that there is to know about these lesser tribes of the garden, and Time would overtake him and gather him to his fathers before he had even begun his study of the birds.

Even if he should achieve the impossible and go to bed some night convinced that there was nothing more to be learned about any creature or plant in the garden, his triumph would be only temporary; for in the night some new thing might happen, some change of wind or weather, and glancing out of his window in the morning, he would see amid the honeysuckles a moth or a beetle or a bird that never until that moment had been seen or heard of within the garden's bounds. And this, moreover, would happen again and again.

It has happened again and again to me, and I know that it will continue to happen; and in this assurance of fresh surprises and discoveries in store lies half the charm of garden natural history. I never know what I shall see when I look up at the sky above the garden; I never can tell what I shall find when I go exploring before breakfast amid the

shrubbery in secluded corners. It may be just a little discovery—some small warbler, common enough in the surrounding country but never seen in the garden before; or it may be a big discovery—something rare, perhaps almost unknown, or else something so wild and shy and strange that its appearance in a city garden seems almost a miracle.

Thus there was a summer morning when I looked out of my window and saw a sight which at first I could not believe. On a limb of a sugarberry tree growing close beside the house stood a tall, long-legged, long-billed bird whose yellow-brown plumage was spotted and streaked with white and buff. It was evidently a heron, which in itself was surprising enough, since the herons that pass over the city seldom come down into the garden trees; but in an instant I was aware of something else still more surprising; namely, that this was a heron of a kind that I had never seen before.

I knew all the herons with one exception—the yellow-crowned night heron, the shyest and most secretive of its race, a dweller in deep swamps where it nests generally in isolated pairs instead of in large colonies like most of its kinsmen. I had been much in the swamps and on the marshes and had seen herons of many kinds in thousands. But in spite of all my seeking in those wild places, I had never up to that time chanced to see a yellow-

crowned night heron; and it was a queer whim of fate to show me my first yellow-crowned heron here in my city garden within a few feet of my bedroom window.

Yet fate has played me that pleasant trick perhaps a score of times. I have gone into the wilderness looking for some specific thing and have searched for it there in vain; and suddenly it has come here to me, and I have seen it from my doorstep.

One April I saw from my doorstep my first worm-eating warbler. A drizzle had been falling all day. A great army of migrants had evidently arrived during the night or just at dawn, for the garden was full of birds which had not been there the day before. Among these were a summer tanager in mottled red and yellow plumage, an ovenbird, and a flock of ten or fifteen magnificent prothonotary warblers. I was watching the prothonotaries with that rapt delight which their indescribable golden beauty always inspires, when I saw in the midst of them a small olive-green bird whose buffy crown was sharply streaked with black.

A little incredulous—for I had searched for the worm-eating warbler often in the woods and had never found it—I left the back steps where I had been sitting and moved cautiously nearer until I stood within fifteen feet of the little bird, which was

busily engaged in examining the under sides of the dripping leaves. I knew then that it was the worm-eater beyond the shadow of a doubt, and that day took its place among the other red-letter days in the garden's history.

I could not name all those red-letter days, for there have been many of them; and there will be many in the calendar of every garden naturalist who keeps his eyes open. It was in the garden that I saw my first scarlet tanager, a bird so rare hereabouts that at the time when I saw mine there were but two other records for this whole region. It was in the garden that I saw my first blackpoll warbler, my first palm warbler, my first prairie warbler, my first blue-gray gnatcatcher. It was in the garden that I saw the only red-breasted nuthatches that I had ever seen in my life and the only pine siskins.

It was, strange to say, from my garden that I saw for the first time that tall, grotesque, black and white stork to which we give the misleading name "wood ibis," and which is the largest and perhaps most interesting of all the birds of the marshes. In summer the wood ibis is abundant in this district, if you know where to look for it. On the vast green flats which it frequents when the breeding season is over it may be found in hundreds from June to October. Yet I had never seen one then; and when, on that morning years ago, I saw that great bird

winging its way high overhead, its long neck and legs outstretched, its wide, white, black-edged pinions fanning the air with slow, measured beats, I thought it the strangest, most outlandish, and yet most beautiful sight that any garden naturalist had ever beheld.

It was not quite that, perhaps; yet it was a fine, wild, stirring picture to see from a city garden, and there was a fantastic quality about it that made it doubly memorable. But the epic scenes, the spectacular happenings, are not all that is worth while in garden natural history.

“He that holds fast the golden mean,
And lives contentedly between
The little and the great—”

So might the true garden naturalist be described. He is not, as many might suppose, condemned to the drab commonplace, compelled to make the best of pitifully meager opportunities and satisfy his craving as best he may upon a few dry crumbs. He is far better off than that, thank Heaven; or, if he is not, he has only himself to blame.

The wilderness will come to him if he waits for it; the lonely marshes will come in the form of some shy heron lingering for an evening in his elms; he can see the distant wastes of Labrador when a north-bound loon looks down at him from the up-

per air; and of all the wild things that fly by day or by night there is none so wild or shy—unless it be the wild turkey—that he cannot cherish the hope of seeing it some morning from the window that looks upon the garden and the broad highway of the sky above it. But he is not—or, at least, he should not be—wholly absorbed in these large hopes of great and strange adventure, nor should he count it a dull or barren week when no new or unusual thing happens. There will be many such weeks, of course, when he will see no creature of any sort except those common, every-day ones with which he is familiar, and will hear no song or call-note except those that make up the ordinary conversation of the garden. He must be content with these and find his interest and pleasure in them. And let it be said with special emphasis that if he is one of those whose sole interest in wild things lies in the making of faunal lists—"annotated lists" is the technical term—he will soon find a garden a dull place and time hanging heavy on his hands.

Such people are mere census-takers. They see a towhee bunting in a blackberry thicket, and as soon as they have identified it, their business with it is over. It is one more species for their list, and they pass on impatiently, seeking others. One of the great advantages of garden natural history

is the fact that it will not let you fall into these bad habits.

The fences shut you in. There are no fields or forests to be explored, and so you are not perpetually tempted to press on in search of new and stranger things. You will stay with the towhee for a while, because there is nowhere else to go; and after a little, looking back over several experiences of the sort, you will realize that they have been better worth your while than the mere cataloguing of a hundred different species.

Thus the very limitations of garden natural history are among its most potent virtues; and it is sober truth that a man may come closer to nature through being confined to a garden than if he had a continent to roam over.

But it is not alone this wholesome discipline of circumstance that makes a garden actually a better school in some respects for the naturalist than the school of the woods. A garden has certain more positive advantages. It is apt to be, in the first place, a sort of oasis in a desert of roofs and streets, and thus it may become a gathering ground for the wild life of a whole neighborhood and be the permanent or temporary home of a greater number of wild things of various sorts than one would find in an average square mile of open country.

Last spring, morning after morning, I saw more

cedar waxwings here than I ever saw in the woods. By breakfast time the trees were fairly brown with them, and the air was full of their plaintive lisping. Around the bird-bath on the lawn they swarmed like bees around the entrance of a hive, crowding and jostling one another in their eagerness to get to the water. Often there must have been at least two hundred of them massed in a space not more than ten feet square, while the number thronging the trees round about and passing incessantly back and forth between the branches and the lawn must have been in the thousands. They were here for three reasons, or rather for one reason compounded of three elements: namely, the bird-bath, the berry-laden Japanese privet trees, and the sugarberry trees. That was a combination of attractions which they could not find in the woods, and it brought them to the garden in such numbers that I could see more of them there in a minute than I could find in the open country in a week.

Nature—wild Nature—dwells in gardens just as she dwells in the tangled woods, in the deeps of the sea, and on the heights of the mountains; and the wilder the garden, the more you will see of her there. If you would see her unspoiled and in many forms, let your garden be a wild place, a place of trees and shrubs and vines and grass, even a place

where weeds are granted a certain tolerance; for gardens which are merely spick and span plots of combed and curried flower-beds have little attraction for the birds or for the other people of the wild.

Yet into any garden, no matter how artificial or how tame, some wild things will find their way. It is a shallow boast, this talk that we hear about man's conquest of nature. It will be time to talk in that fashion when man has learned to check or control the march of the seasons or when he has brought some spot of earth so thoroughly under his dominion that it remains insensible to the impulse of the spring. He has not done that yet, and he never will. Spring in a garden is as irresistible, as incredible, as spring in the heart of the wilderness. It is as though a vast, intangible, invisible wave swept up from the south and flooded all the land. The fences, walls, and streets cannot keep it out, cannot check it for an instant.

"The eternal surge
Of time and tide rolls in";

and as quickly, as eagerly, as wonderfully as the green swamps where the deer are lying and the wild-cat lurks, the garden responds to the magical, rapturous influence of that vernal flood.

"The whole air rings with song, these cool spring

mornings," I quote a notebook entry to show what music a little piece of city land may offer. "The brown thrasher has lost all trace of his former shyness and reserve. He chooses a lofty and conspicuous perch, usually the top of a tall elm, and pours out his music with great power and in wonderful volume. The orchard orioles are at the crest of their spring ecstasy. The cardinals, though they have reared one brood and must now be busy with another, are never silent in the mornings. The sweet, languorous music of nonpareils is all about. Among the musicians I count also the crested flycatcher, who shouts rather than sings, but who shouts so cheerfully and with such good humor, at least to the human ear, that one loves to hear him. Kingbirds with their screeching supply a discordant note, and yellow-billed cuckoos a strange, mysterious one; and sometimes in the early mornings, purple martins circle above the grass plot, uttering, as they wheel here and there, the soft, flute-like sounds that distinguish them as the most musical among the swallows. Amid all the rest, of course, one hears the ceaseless twittering of the swifts, out from their chimneys at break of day, winnowing the air in their quest for food, or, as I often guess, in pure joy of tireless and marvelously skilful flying. Last but not least the mockingbirds, and I put them last because just now they have suffered

a slump in their singing and are heard less often than any of the others mentioned. Domestic cares weigh them down, and having begun their spring singing earlier than most of the others, they are entitled now to a rest."

That is but a hurried and incomplete sketch of an average performance of the garden's spring chorus. I give it as it stands because, although it ignores altogether the less conspicuous performers, it affords an idea of how many and various are the tunes from Pan's pipes that you may hear even in a small garden in a city, if you have an ear and a mind for such music on a sunny morning in May.

For you will not hear those tunes unless your ears are open to them and your mind is alert for them. The orioles sing all over town in April, but most of the men and women in the streets do not know it. They hear the rich, clear notes, and yet do not hear them. Their ears receive the sound, but they themselves are not conscious of it. And you will see nothing at all unless you look for the things that are to be seen. If you assume that every small bird in the garden elms or in the trees along the street is only an English sparrow, and that every big bird that flies over is only a turkey buzzard, then you will see nothing but sparrows and buzzards and will be confirmed in the idea that persons who talk about hermit thrushes and oven-

birds and eagles and wood ibises in the city are triflers with the truth.

Not for these wilfully blind and deaf ones does Nature work her miracles, display her colors, and sing her careless melodies even in the very heart of man's citadel. They do not see or hear her. Yet she is there beside them and all around them, all the beauty and wonder of her, not hiding herself, not shrinking from human view, but flaunting her gay flags in the open, tempting discovery, and eager to be discovered.

It is the easiest discovery in the world to make. Glancing out of the window on a winter morning, I saw a big, hearty yellow-hammer—which is a better name than "flicker" for the handsomest of the woodpeckers—fly over, rising and falling in his undulating flight as though he rode through the air on the back of a galloping horse. Two minutes later I watched two bluejays on the window-sill and was struck again by the keen cleverness of their bright, beady eyes. They were stealing the corn and oats that had been put on the sill for the cardinals, and they scrutinized me sharply, knowing they had no proper business there. A rustling among some dead leaves in a retired corner revealed a fine fox sparrow, largest and handsomest of the numerous sparrow race. Standing on the piazza, I saw or heard within a period of not more

than three minutes cardinals, mockingbirds, goldfinches, white-throated sparrows, fish crows, myrtle warblers, and a robin. And this was in mid-January, the dulllest season for birds in the garden, except perhaps the fag-end of summer.

Even then there was no lack of feathered life, and I knew what was to come later, a vast and varied host: purple martins and clouds of chimney swifts; perhaps a band of purple finches when the elm blossoms and seeds clothed the twigs in purple; pugnacious kingbirds and crested flycatchers; ruby-throated humming-birds, eerie yellow-billed cuckoos, spirited orchard orioles; waxwings in scores or in hundreds; red-eyed and white-eyed vireos, the former sedate and solemn in their ways and in their tunes, the latter anything but sedate or solemn; methodical little black and white warblers, splendid golden prothonotaries, and black-throated blue warblers less brilliant but not less beautiful; redstarts, prairie warblers, yellowthroats; hooded warblers more gorgeous if possible than the prothonotaries; and, most gorgeous of all, nonpareils "colored like a fairy-tale" in brilliant blue, vivid green, and glowing red, true birds of paradise from those tropical lands where nature is so lavish with her brightest pigments.

All these, and more, will surely come year after year—there is doubt only about the purple finches—

and who can tell what else will come also? Perhaps the troupial, which Audubon says was seen here in his day, but which has never been seen in North America since; perhaps the rare gray kingbird which Audubon's friend, John Bachman, discovered here in 1832 and which in 1888 nested in an elm not two hundred yards from where I sit, but for which I have so far looked in vain.

There is no telling what will come. My hopes stop at nothing short of the wild turkey—and do not stop even there. One morning some years ago three wild geese bound for Canada were so close to me in the garden that I might have hit one of them with a baseball. There are more than a few turkeys in the swamps of this region, and if I have seen wild geese within a stone's throw of my doorstep, why is a fine wild gobbler in the garden impossible?

It is not. Very few things are, for sometimes nature seems to take delight in making the impossible happen. I may yet see a wild gobbler walking past my doorstep, just as I once saw half-a-dozen woodcock. But if the gobbler never comes, after all I shall not miss him. The cardinal and the summer tanager are just as beautiful; the mockingbird and the bluejay are just as intelligent; the loggerhead has just as much personality; the white-headed eagle and the long-winged osprey circling

far up in the blue under the white feathery clouds are just as stately.

The garden can do without the wild turkey, because it has so many other things that are worth seeing and worth learning about. Here is another nesting season only a little way off, and I have not yet looked into the nest that a pair of crested flycatchers built in the martin house last year to see whether or not they were able to find a snake-skin with which to line their city home. I have not yet found out where the little anolis lizard, so abundant on vine-clad walls and fences in the summer, spends the cold months. I have not yet found a hummingbird's nest in the garden, though I know that the bird breeds there. I have not yet really begun to name the host of weeds or the vast multitude of insects, and there are a thousand other things yet undone, a thousand other questions not yet answered.

I am just at the outer fringe of experience and knowledge of the things that grow and live in this little place. And perhaps I shall never get very much farther than that; because, even if one should give himself up to them altogether, and never do any other work and never steal a day off to go fishing, there are so many of those things that one could never see and learn them all and thus find himself, like Gibbon when he had completed his history,

dismayed and desolate because an end had come to pleasant labors.

Always there will be new sights to be seen, new secrets to be discovered in the trees, in the grass, in the air. Nature, even the little bit of her that is within our ken, is illimitable, inexhaustible. Never in the longest life can we read her book from cover to cover so that she will have nothing more to interest us. For the man or woman who watches in a garden or any other green place, that is a happy thought to carry in the mind.

WOODS TREACHERIES

HERE can be no better place to watch marsh hawks than Fenwick Hall in the Carolina Low Country. This is so partly because of the wide sweep of the wet meadows and marshes between the ruined mansion and the winding river, and partly because of the romance that invests the spot. The beautiful daughter of Lord Fenwick—according to the tale—fell in love with a groom in her father's stables.* She ran away and married him, but the old hawk, her father, owner of some of the finest race horses in the Province, pursued and overtook the fugitives. He made short work of the marriage.

Tradition provides the outlines for a tragic picture—the young man bound and seated on his horse, a noose around his neck, the rope slung over a limb of a gray-bearded live-oak whose huge arms spread far and wide in the gloom overhead; Fenwick pale and implacable on his panting racer; the

* There was no *Lord* Fenwick in early Carolinian history. In the legend, however, the master of Fenwick Hall sometimes appears as a Lord. It should be said plainly, too, that there is probably not a word of truth in the story. Fortunately, legends are not required to be true.

daughter hysterical with terror; the flaring torches of Fenwick's negro henchmen casting a lurid, flickering light upon the scene.

Just how the thing was done, the story does not make clear. Perhaps they forced her to it by main strength; perhaps she stood in such awful fear of her father that his word of command was enough. At any rate, the legend says that it was the girl herself who lashed the horse from under her lover.

From Fenwick Hall, where the negroes who live near by hear ghosts moaning and crying on windy nights, an old causeway, lined with shrubbery and trees, leads across the marshes to the river a mile or so to the east; and beneath this causeway, it is said, a secret passage ran underground from the house to the edge of the water. That this subterranean way once extended as far as the river and was used by the master of Fenwick as a means of smuggling in forbidden goods, may be doubted. Only a short section of it remains, and it may be that this is all there ever was—possibly an outlet from the mansion, designed to permit the escape of a messenger in case of Indian attack. But whether or not the tunnel once went all the way to the river, and whether or not in the old days smugglers, who were pirates as well, passed through it under the ground, the legend has it so. It is an agreeable tale to think of; and thinking of it added something to the

pleasure of even a matter-of-fact man, not a purveyor of romance, whose prime business on the causeway was the watching of marsh hawks, and who had gone there because it was a good place from which to watch these birds.

Yet I found it hard to keep my mind on the marsh hawks that afternoon. Though several of them were seen from time to time, flying low above the green grassy plains near the river, my thoughts wandered away from them, often returning to the old deserted house of brick behind me, from the high roof of which, when it was first built, one might have watched the canoes of red men passing up and down the Stono. But while my brain was busy with other things, my eyes followed the slow, graceful flight of the big harriers quartering the marsh meadows in their search for prey; and suddenly I saw one of them halt in the air, hang poised for a moment, then dart down. In a quarter of a minute he was up and away again, his talons empty; but in the intervening fraction of time something had happened.

Just above the tips of the marsh blades, the hawk had checked his descent with a frantic and desperate beating of his wings; then with powerful downward strokes he had shot swiftly upward. Evidently he had discovered in the nick of time that the object in the marsh grass, which had attracted

his attention and brought him swooping down, was not what he had supposed it to be. Perhaps, instead of a mouse or a marsh sparrow, a sly raccoon was crouching in the reeds, his paw raised for a fatal blow. At any rate, it was laughable to see the sudden panic of the hawk; and, as I watched him sailing away from the spot where he had had a good scare, and perhaps a narrow escape, I was reminded of a true story of a hawk, which I had heard not long before—one of the strangest of many stories gathered from hunters and woodsmen of the Low Country.

It was a tale of a hawk and a deer hunter who fell asleep at his stand in the woods; and, more particularly, it was a tale of this deer hunter's flowing white beard. The dogs were far off. Their music came faint and thin from the other side of the swamp. There was little chance that the deer would come our old gentleman's way. So, keen hunter though he was, he sat down at the foot of a tree, holding his gun between his knees, the muzzle pointing upward, and in a few moments he was asleep.

How long he dozed, he never knew. Suddenly the gun was almost knocked from between his knees, and he opened his eyes to find that a large hawk, plunging downward from the air, had hurled itself against the end of the gun barrel and lay dead at

his feet. Undoubtedly it was the white beard that had caught the hawk's eye and brought him dashing down to instant annihilation. Probably the hawk had no time to be surprised; but there was never a more astounded deer hunter than this veteran of many hunts, when he realized that, while he slept peacefully in the wood, a hawk had made a target of his beard.

It was not one of the long-winged, rather deliberate harriers of the Fenwick marshes that made this dramatic, ill-starred raid. The marsh hawk, too, shows speed and dash at times, as when he falls suddenly upon a clapper rail crouching on her nest among the reeds; but, with the exception of the rare peregrine falcon, the swiftest and boldest of all the feathered buccaneers of the Low Country are the blue darter hawks, as they are called hereabouts—the big blue darter, to which the scientists give the colorless name of Cooper's hawk, and the little blue darter, termed with equal inappropriateness the sharp-shinned hawk. These two are the heroes of most of the spectacular stories that are told of hawks in this region, which, because of its abundant wild life, great tracts of wooded country, and inaccessible marshlands, is a hunting-ground for many hawks; and it was almost certainly a big blue darter that committed assault and battery upon the sleeping deer hunter's beard.

Strange as that assault was, anyone who knows this bold brigand, and has observed his headlong recklessness in action, can understand readily enough how the thing occurred. The hawk, cruising silently through the long aisles of the woods, swerving swiftly in and out among the tree-trunks, and scanning the ground and thicket-tops for some bird or rabbit or other woods dweller which would satisfy his appetite, was suddenly aware of a white object beneath him. The blue darter is set on a hair-trigger. When he hunts on the wing in the woods, the moment his eye spots the prey, he plunges. Perhaps this hawk thought that the white thing beneath him was a hen, which had strayed from some farm or negro cabin. It is more likely that he did not pause to consider at all, but, responding instantly to instinct, doubled his speed and shot down like an arrow to his death.

Death sets some queer ambuscades in the woods. Near the west bank of the South Santee, on an abandoned plantation which the Santee wilderness has reclaimed, there is a mound which is said to be a grave—one of the oddest graves in the Low Country. Here, tradition says, was buried many years ago a beautiful young girl, the dearly beloved of her father, the master of the plantation; and the story runs that, in order to make sure that she would be

ready when the Last Trumpet sounded, he buried her in an erect position so that she could step forth instantly from her tomb on the Day of the Resurrection. Hence the grave—if it is a grave—standing by itself in a lonely, secluded spot, is taller than most graves, being some five or six feet in height.

There is no stone, but from the cone-shaped mound grows a handsome pine. The deer, which frequent these woods, come to the place sometimes at night; you can stand by the mound on an evening in May or June and hear the big alligators of the Santee bellowing in the river a half-mile or so away; and as you walk through the thickets around the grave, you must keep a sharp look-out, for in summer this deserted plantation is a paradise for snakes.

I had gone to the spot hoping to find some snakes, especially one sort of snake in which I was interested at the time; and I was disappointed when none was discovered near the grave. But I had better luck amid the ruins of the old plantation house, whose tall chimneys and massive walls of brick have now been so hemmed in and engulfed by the forest that a man might pass twenty yards from the house and never see it.

For the most part the walls still stand, and the heavy stone steps at front and rear remain, though

some of them have been heaved up from their places by the slow, irresistible strength of great roots that twine and twist amid the ruins. But there is now no vestige of a roof or of floors, and tall trees grow inside the house, some of them soaring high up above the jagged walls, while the trunks of others, which must have begun their growth before the roof fell in, protrude through the high, wide windows. It was a grotesque and melancholy sight, all the more tragical because this old house had once been the home of one of the great Low Country families, which had given distinguished men to the colony and to the state. But the strangest thing about it to my mind was the wide, deep, bricked-in well, which we found within the walls of the house; and to me at that moment the most interesting thing about the well was what we saw at the bottom of it. The water of the well, twelve feet or so below the surface of the ground, was alive with snakes, the copper-colored snakes for which I had been looking; and with them was another snake worth seeing—a huge diamond rattler.

The copper-colored serpents—red-bellied water-snakes, a vicious though not a venomous species—swam sinuously about in the water, or hung in long loops upon sticks and small branches that had fallen into the well; but the great rattlesnake lay in the water, with two thirds of its thick body submerged,

and after a few moments we realized that it was dead. Then for the first time I suspected that the place was not a serpent den, but a serpent mausoleum, and the negro woodsman who had guided us to the spot confirmed the guess. Many snakes, he said, lived amid these ruins, and now and then one of them, crawling to the edge of the well or along the branches overhanging it, fell in. For these, he declared, there was no escape, for the brick walls of the well were sound and unbroken and there was no subterranean passageway through which the reptiles could leave their prison.

There, if the negro was right, they must stay until the end came, the water-snakes surviving for a long while, the land-snakes succumbing quickly. No one knew, the old hunter said, how many dead serpents lay hidden under the waters of the well; and I wondered how many hundreds of them had perished in this ambushade during the long years that had passed since the manor fell into decay, and the snakes of the surrounding woods had come to live in it, instead of the powdered gentlemen and brocaded ladies who had danced the stately old dances there in the palmy days of the Santee plantation country. Year after year this yawning death-trap in this house of serpents had taken its toll of the scaly inhabitants of the place. Those that we saw were only a few of its many scores of vic-

tims, and they would not be the last. It was as strange a sepulchre as the tall grave in the woods, where, if we can trust the legend, the daughter of the old house stands upright in her shroud, awaiting the Judgment Day.

Sometimes, as if tiring of her accustomed methods, Nature beguiles her victims with novel stratagems. There is a long, narrow island, with the sea on one side and wide green marshlands on the other, which, if it were properly named, would be called the Isle of Pirate Ghosts. Off this island, in the old buccaneer days, the black-flag fleet of Blackbeard and Stede Bonnet lay in ambush for unsuspecting merchantmen who came sailing out of Charles Town; and it is reasonable to suppose, even if there be no mention of it in the record, that more than once, on moonlight nights, the corsair chiefs came ashore here to stretch their legs and tap a cask of wine on the beach. Like all the rest of the Low Country, the lonely barrier islands are crowded with old memories; and since most ghosts are nothing but old memories that have taken human shape, as gray or white clouds in the sky sometimes assume the form of familiar things, it is safe to say that ghosts of pirates haunt this island. Once or twice in the dusk, I have thought for an instant that I caught sight of them.

One morning I was fishing for channel bass in the surf on this Isle of Pirate Ghosts, when I saw something which brought back to my mind a story told to me years ago by an old negro fisherman. My attention was attracted by a shrill screaming behind me, and, turning, I saw an osprey circling high over the island woods, while just above him circled and swooped and swerved a bald eagle.

I watched the drama with interest, knowing what would happen; and presently the osprey dropped his fish, and the eagle, his body slanting sharply, slid downward through the air. Whether he overtook the fish and grasped it before it fell into the woods or the marsh behind the island, I do not know, for a tall dune behind me hid the plunging bird from view; but the incident recalled the fisherman's story—a story which, like many of the tales told by the negro boatmen of the coast, seems to me now less improbable than it appeared at the time when I heard it.

He was fishing in his small rowboat in one of the inlets between two barrier islands, when he saw an eagle overtake and attack an osprey which was flying across the inlet with a fish in its claws. The birds were not very high in the air, and the hawk, instead of holding on to his fish for some minutes and circling upward, as the osprey often does, apparently in an effort to get above the eagle, gave

up the struggle quickly and dropped his prey. The eagle plunged after it; but so short was the distance that the fish fell into the water before he could seize it. The big bird checked his descent and hung poised for a moment. Then, half closing his wings, he shot down again and struck the water in a shower of spray.

That was the last of him. Seen dimly through the spray for a fraction of a second, his dark wings had seemed to beat the air desperately; then the place where they had been was empty. Sharks were very abundant that morning, the fisherman said. He had caught a number of small ones, from a foot and a half to two feet in length, and had seen several large ones swimming close to the top of the water near his boat. It was his belief that the poised eagle, scanning the water for the fish that the osprey had dropped, saw a dark object just beneath the surface and, plunging instantly, struck his talons into the back of a large shark and was carried down.

A fitting death for the king of the air, cut off, in the prime of his splendid powers, in combat with the wolf of the sea. But I remember, that, when the old man told me the story, I hoped that it was not true.

AHOW'HE OF THE OVERHILLS

ONE day about noon, in the deep woods of the Overhills, we found a small secluded glade which was the kind of place for which we had been looking. I knew at once that many good things could happen there, and we sat down near the edge of a clear, hemlock-shaded brook, hoping that a certain good thing would happen. But the minutes passed uneventfully, and at last we went on our way, disappointed though not discouraged. I knew that we had made no mistake about the place. We had come at the wrong time—that was all. So a little before sunset we returned and again sat down to watch and listen.

In that hour of stillness and of misty azure light the charm of the spot was enhanced a hundredfold. Its remoteness, its loneliness, certain slim clean-cut footprints which I had found in the sand beside the stream, all these contributed to its magic. Not far away rose the peak of Tsuwatelda, the hollow mountain, within which, in a spacious country deep under the rocks, dwelt those mysterious spirit-folk whom the Indians of the Overhills called the Nun'ne'hi: and near at hand, in another direction,

was the place where the lost town of Kanasta once stood—a town which vanished long ago, years before the white men's coming, because its people decided that they were tired of wars and the snows of winter and preferred to live under Tsuwatelda with the Nun'ne'hi in their green, peaceful, invisible, happy land.

But it was not of these old legends of the Cherokees that I was thinking. In bygone days that powerful nation had ruled all the Overhills, all the blue hazy peaks and winding valleys of the Blue Ridge, the Smokies and the Balsams. But from all except one remote corner of this high mountain country the red warriors and hunters had long since departed; and doubtless the Nun'ne'hi departed with them and are to be found to-day only in that one valley which the Cherokees still inhabit, the hidden beautiful valley of Oona Lufta under the eastern rampart of the Smokies. The spot where we sat down to wait and watch that afternoon just before sunset was some fifty miles distant from Oona Lufta: and the thing which we hoped to see was a thing more tangible and substantial than the spirit-folk of the ancient Cherokee myths; a being not invisible like the Nun'ne'hi, yet almost as elusive as they; a creature that walked on four feet but left footprints so shapely and fine that they were almost fairy-like in their gracefulness.

We were looking for Ahow'he, the loveliest of all the wild dwellers in the Overhills.

It was very still in those deep woods where the light was soft, though not yet dim, and no breeze stirred. The little stream which stole out of a dense laurel thicket beside the glade flowed almost soundlessly over its bed of smooth black rock and shining yellow sand. Far above us the feathery tops of tall hemlocks swayed and trembled; but there was no audible rustling of the lustrous ever-green foliage around us, and only now and then could I detect the thin, tinkling music of the brook's tiny waterfalls. Minute after minute we waited and heard no sound of any live thing until suddenly from the steep, densely wooded mountain side beyond the stream came the loud, clear whistle of a tufted titmouse.

"Here, here," the voice seemed to say; and again "Here, here; here, here," repeating the word eagerly, earnestly, as though the bird were trying to call attention to something which it saw but which we did not see. Over and over again it uttered the same note, drawing nearer all the while, whistling that insistent "Here, here; here, here." It was still invisible amid the trees; but in my mind I could picture it—a little, ashen, crested bird, flitting from twig to twig, peering excitedly downward, perhaps following with its round beady eyes a long, slim,

gray-brown shape which stole on delicate noiseless feet across the velvet-soft woods-carpet under the hemlocks.

"Here, here, here," it continued to cry, drawing ever nearer; and it was easy to imagine that the bird was calling to us and saying "Here it is! Here it is! Here is the beautiful thing for which you are looking." It was thus that my fancy translated those clear, oft-repeated calls; and for some moments I found myself actually believing that the slim, gray-brown form of Ahow'he, whom we hoped to see in that secret spot, was in truth about to emerge from the thickets and reveal itself to our eager eyes.

But minute followed minute and Ahow'he did not appear; and presently I recalled certain old sayings and beliefs about this little crested bird, this tufted titmouse who is the chickadee's first cousin and who goes about through the woods crying "Here, here, here," as though summoning all the woods folk to come and see something which he has discovered.

I remembered that, according to the learned men of the ancient Cherokee race, Utsugi the tufted titmouse and Tsikilili the black-capped chickadee are not ordinary birds but little feathered magicians who know many hidden things and that often they act as messengers of the woods gods, bringing tid-

ings of those whose coming is expected. But I remembered, too, that Tsikilili is considered much more trustworthy than Utsugi; that the latter is often a deceitful messenger and a spreader of falsehoods; and that once, many years ago, the warriors caught Utsugi and cut off the tip of his tongue because they believed that he had lied to them in the hour of danger. Recalling these things, which somehow seemed very real to me then, I lost all faith in this tufted titmouse crying "Here, here, here" from the hemlock branches as though to apprise us of Ahow'he's coming, and was ready to agree with that old Indian tradition which brands Utsugi as a mischievous messenger whose tidings cannot be trusted.

Then, just as I had reached this sorrowful conclusion concerning a bird which had always been one of my favorites, I realized suddenly that Ahow'he was standing in full view before us.

She had come as she so often comes at such a time and in such a place—as noiselessly as the shadow of a cloud. When she is in haste, fleeing from some danger, or when the night has shut down and she knows that no men lurk in the black woods which are not black at all to her luminous eyes, she moves less silently and you can hear the slight sounds of her passage. But when the day is just fading to dusk and there is still light enough in the

woods for men to see and perhaps to kill, Ahow'he the white-tailed deer walks warily and with so delicate a tread that even the great horned owls, those sinister sentinels of the twilight whose ears are of almost supernatural keenness, sometimes see her before they hear her.

This faculty of appearing soundlessly and mysteriously, as though some magic incantation had fashioned her suddenly out of empty air, adds vastly to her charm. It enhances, too, the delight of what must be to all lovers of wild creatures a perennially fascinating pursuit—namely, watching for deer in the deep woods just at that mystical sunset hour of soft light when the stillness of evening settles down upon the forest, and the deer, after lying in their secret beds all day, are beginning to stir and to move about in search of water or food. Your ears are strained to catch the faintest sound. As intently as though your life depended upon your alertness, you listen and watch, your eyes ceaselessly scanning the thicket edges, turning your head slowly from time to time to search every part of the glade. Yet the chances are that you will neither see nor hear Ahow'he's coming. All at once you will discover that she is there before you. Whence she came and how she came you can only guess.

It was in this magical way that she appeared

before us that evening in the Kanasta woods where we had heard Utsugi the tufted titmouse crying "Here, here, here," as though telling us that she was approaching. She came just at the close of day, a big beautiful doe, more beautiful even than her beautiful Indian name; a doe larger than the average but long-bodied, lithe and slender. We did not see her come and we had heard no sound. Suddenly, mysteriously she was there in the open near the further end of the glade not more than twenty yards away.

A moment she paused to look about her, a mist-like, almost impalpable form, yet plainly visible in the soft bluish light. Then, unconscious of our presence, she passed slowly on across the open and faded into the gloom of the forest.

The white-tailed deer, heaven be praised, is not one of those wild creatures doomed to certain extinction and already so rare that only a favored few can hope to see them. Many men and women know the animal fairly well, for of all our larger mammals it has held its own best in the face of civilization. But no matter how often one sees it—and I am speaking now not of the pampered, half-domesticated deer of private estates and gardens but of the wild deer of the forest, among the shyest and most elusive of all wild creatures—the sight of it is always a fresh delight not only because

of its slimness and etherial grace but because it is so perfectly and completely a part of that wildness of the woods which is an even more precious thing than their beauty.

Hence, even if there were nothing else to impress the picture upon my memory, I should remember that big doe of the Overhills, seen just at sunset, in a silent lonely woodland spot, in the shadow of towering hemlocks and against a background of dark, large-leafed laurel. But there is a special reason for remembering her, a reason apart from the loveliness of the sight itself and of its setting.

She is Utsugi's doe. It was a foolish fancy, perhaps—that odd notion which formed itself in my mind when, as we watched and listened for the deer that we hoped to see, we heard a tufted titmouse crying "Here, here, here" in the hemlocks. Yet it was no more than natural that the notes of the little bird, heard just at that moment of expectation and in those wild and beautiful surroundings, should recall the Indian belief that the titmouse is sometimes a woods messenger bringing tidings of one whose coming is expected.

At any rate, no matter how foolish the fancy, chance decreed that it should be most strangely and beautifully confirmed by the event. Just at the right moment the doe appeared. Hence in my recollection she will be known always as Utsugi's

doe; and as long as woodland scenes are remembered, she will recall to my mind a certain old legend of the Cherokees in which Utsugi figures together with his kinsman, Tsikilili the chickadee—a legend out of which, perhaps may have grown that widespread belief, shared by many different tribes, that the titmouse and the chickadee are wiser than most other birds and often play the part of messengers or news-bearers.

Now the dry-as-dust naturalist has no use for legends. He is interested only in the natural history of the birds which he studies; and it would be difficult to add anything important to what is already known about the natural history of the tufted titmouse and the chickadee. Throughout the greater part of America they are among the most familiar of feathered friends; and they are held in especially high regard because when winter drives most of the other birds southward, the chickadee and the titmouse refuse to retreat before the cold and still hold high carnival in the ice-bound woods and whistle their cheery notes in the leafless, desolate parks and gardens. Hence most people love and everyone knows these two little birds which are with us always; and it might be assumed that nothing new could be written about bird neighbors so familiar to millions of people as these two kindred species.

Yet the chances are that only a few among those millions know one thing which is worth knowing about these familiar birds, though it is not a part of their natural history; namely, that ancient legend of the Overhill Indians in which Utsugi, the tufted titmouse, and Tsikilili, the chickadee, appear perhaps for the first time in recorded human annals. Probably long before the scientists wrote their first treatises about these two species, long before they were classified and honored with Latin names, long before the face of a white man had been seen on this continent, the titmouse and the chickadee were playing their part in that story. Probably it was an old, old story in the days when Moytoy of Tellequo was High Chief of all the nations of the Overhills; and doubtless the Cherokee wise men handed it down through the time of Corane the Raven, and of Oconostota the Great Warrior, and of Attakullakulla the Wise, and of Younaguska the good chief who, in order to serve his people's need, once visited the Darkening Land where the spirits dwell. In this way the tale has survived even until these modern days when the Cherokees, no longer lords of all the Overhills, still inhabit their beautiful valley of Oona Lufta in the shadow of the high Smokies, one of the loveliest of all the Appalachian valleys.

This is the tale which the old men handed down; the tale of Utlunta the Spear Finger, and Utsugi

the tufted titmouse, and Tsikilili the black-capped chickadee.

Long years ago, soon after the beginning of the world, a terrible danger came upon the people of the Overhills. An Evil Being appeared in the mountains, a female demon who could take any shape she desired. Those who met her on the mountain trails generally believed her to be a woman from some near-by village, for there was nothing suspicious in her appearance except the fact that she kept her right hand hidden under her robe; but few of those who met her thus in the lonely forest paths ever returned to look again upon the faces of their little ones. That right hand which she kept so carefully concealed was such a hand as no mortal ever possessed. Its forefinger was not a finger at all but a long thin shaft of bone, hard as steel and sharp as a needle; and with this dreadful weapon she was sure to stab her unsuspecting victim in some vital place, often the back of the neck, killing him instantly. For this reason the Indians called her Utlunta the Spear Finger.

Now this was a danger such as the people of the Overhills had never known before, and they were at a loss how to deal with it; for besides her lethal spear finger with which she slew her victims, Utlunta possessed, when she assumed her proper form, a skin which was made of stone and which

was so hard that no arrow or lance could penetrate it. So great was her strength that she could lift and carry huge boulders of rock; and it was related that once, in order to pass more easily over the intervening ranges, she built a vast rock bridge through the air from a peak far over on Hiawassee to Sanigilagi, the highest peak of the Cowees, which some have called Unaka Kanoos and which is known today as Whiteside Mountain. But there was one other more powerful than she—the Red Spirit of the Thunders; and before she had completed her bridge the Red Spirit hurled his lightning against it and shattered it into fragments. You may still see those fragments, it is said, if you will look for them in the right places; and I have seen on the summit of Sanigilagi high above the clouds great masses of rock which might well have come from that wonderful bridge of Utlunta.

If the people of the Overhills could have obtained the assistance of the Red Thunder God in their warfare against Utlunta the Spear Finger, they might have made short work of her; but the Thunder God contented himself with destroying Utlunta's bridge, and the tribesmen had to defend themselves as best they could. This was a hard task, for the Spear Finger was cunning as well as strong, and the birds and animals, who were much more powerful in those days than they are now, had already grown hostile

to the race of man because the latter had mistreated them. It seems that, of all the wild creatures of the woods and the air, only Utsugi the tufted titmouse and Tsikilili the chickadee took note of the tribesmen's danger.

Doubtless in that time of peril and dismay the trembling women of the villages and even the bravest of the warriors thought longingly of those friendly spirit-folk, the Nun'ne'hi, who lived in their invisible world beneath Tsuwatelda and certain other mountains and under the rocky beds of the streams. If only the Nun'ne'hi would come forth from their secret kingdom as they had been known to do in the past—hundreds and hundreds of plumed and painted warriors led by tall, mighty war chiefs—and help the people of the Overhills, Utlunta might be overthrown and killed. Doubtless in all the villages the people fasted and prayed and the shamans and the conjurers and those greatest wizards known as Adawehi used all their incantations and spells in supplication; and doubtless the invisible drums of the Nun'ne'hi were heard under the hills, as they were generally to be heard by those who had fasted for seven days and seven nights until they were weak with fasting.

But, as was so often the case, the subterranean drum-beating signified nothing. Week after week the people waited, and still the Nun'ne'hi did not

come; and at last the chiefs and the headmen realized that they could expect no help from the gods but must act for themselves before Utlunta destroyed all the tribes of the Overhills.

A great council was held and many plans were suggested and considered. Finally, when the talk was over and each knew his part, the warriors began to prepare for their perilous enterprise.

First they dug a deep pit across a trail where the Spear Finger sometimes walked and covered it with brushwood, leaves, and grass. Then a picked band of the bravest and strongest warriors, under the ablest of the war chiefs was stationed in ambush near this trail. It must have been an anxious time for the warriors of that army, for few of them believed that their weapons could pierce the Spear Finger's stone armor. Utsugi the titmouse and Tsikilili the chickadee seem to have been present from the beginning, but probably none noticed them in that hour of suspense and danger while the warriors waited in their ambush for the coming of their terrible enemy.

It was not long before they saw a woman walking along the trail. They recognized her as a woman of a village near by whom many of the warriors knew, but they observed immediately that as she came on she kept her right hand under her robe. Yet they were not sure that she was Utlunta the

Spear Finger until she stepped on the brushwood covering the pit and fell through into the pit itself.

Then in an instant she revealed her true character. The warriors crowding round the edge of the pit looked down and saw beneath them no woman, no creature of mortal form, but a she-devil, woman-like yet unlike any woman; a she-devil awful to look upon and doubly frightful in her tempestuous rage; a demon clad in black armor of stone thrusting madly upward at the circle of her assailants with that long, horrible spear finger which had taken so many lives.

Even the bravest of the tried and tested warriors might well have quailed at that sight. But the valiant war chiefs urged them on and the conjurers chanted the songs of victory; and knowing that the lives of all the people of the Overhills depended upon their courage, they fought a good fight against their dread antagonist.

Arrow after arrow rained down upon her. Again and again the flint heads of lances rang against her stony mail. But it was as the older chiefs had feared. The arrows fell broken at her feet. Lances so tough and sharp that no shield of buffalo-hide could withstand them glanced harmlessly from her body. She grinned horribly and hurled at the warriors grim taunts and gruesome threats; and at last they knew that their fight was fruitless, that pres-

ently Utlunta the Spear Finger, invulnerable and merciless, would climb up out of the pit and slay them all.

It was then that Utsugi the tufted titmouse, who had watched the battle from the beginning, began to sing "Un, un, un" so loudly and so insistently that all the warriors heard it and took heed. What Utsugi really meant by that song which sounded like "Un, un, un" is not certainly known to this day; but the chiefs believed that he was trying to say "unahu," which means "heart" in the Cherokee tongue, so they bade the bowmen aim at the spot where Utlunta's heart should be. The result was still the same. The arrows glanced aside from that impenetrable armor of stone and fell to the ground with their flint heads dulled or cracked.

Then, in that moment of despair, when all hope seemed to have fled, the warriors saw a strange sight. They saw Tsikilili the chickadee fly down into the pit and alight for an instant on Utlunta's right hand. They knew that so unusual a happening must have some meaning; and doubtless even in the fury and excitement of that terrific combat, the shamans and the conjurers read the sign and told the warriors what to do. From that time forward the bowmen aimed at Utlunta's right hand upon which for one brief moment Tsikilili the chickadee had perched; and very soon they knew

that Tsikilili had told them the truth. Utlunta's heart was on the inside of her palm; and when at last an arrow struck just where her spear finger joined her hand, she fell dead and the battle was won.

So perished Utlunta the Spear Finger, the stone-armored demon of the Overhills; and it was a happy ending for all who witnessed that memorable battle save only Utsugi the tufted titmouse who in the heat of the conflict had cried "Un, un, un" to the warriors and thus had caused them to waste their arrows against Utlunta's granite breast.

The conjurers said that Utsugi had lied to them and must be punished. So they caught the little bird and cut off the tip of his tongue; and ever since then the Cherokees have held him in suspicion as a messenger whose tidings cannot be trusted, while, on the other hand, they hold his kinsman Tsikilili in high regard as a teller of the truth. If ever there was one among them who took Utsugi's part, saying that the little bird had not lied but had only been misunderstood, his name is not remembered. Yet I think that must have been the way of it. For it was Utsugi the titmouse who told us truthfully that evening in the Kanasta woods that Ahow'he the shy graceful one, was coming.

I thought of these things as we waited quietly in the darkening forest after Utsugi's doe had passed

on across the glade and disappeared in the deep woods beyond; and I said to myself that on my next visit to Ocona Lufta valley I would have something to tell my Cherokee friends in defense of the little gray tufted bird who is treated so shabbily in the legend of Utlunta. Then idly I began to think about Tsikilili, another of my favorites, and to wonder where he was, for often in the mountain woods the titmouse and the chickadee are found in company.

True, it was a little late in the evening for Tsikilili to be abroad; but his cousin, the titmouse, had not yet retired for the night, and it seemed rather odd to find one of them and not the other. Utsugi had wandered on up the mountain side beyond the glade, apparently following the doe. I could still hear him crying "Here, here, here" in the hemlocks and the tall, straight-trunked tulip trees. Because in all that dim, seemingly empty forest no other bird sang or chirped, I continued to listen intently to Utsugi's calls growing fainter and fainter in the distance; and suddenly, as I listened, I heard, or thought that I heard, high up on the wooded mountain side behind and above me the thin, hurried note of a chickadee.

Now this was no extraordinary occurrence. Since at least one titmouse was still up and about despite the lateness of the hour, it was natural enough that

a chickadee should also be heard in the same locality. Yet, in view of what had just happened, it was perhaps not surprising that the note of this chickadee thrilled me strangely—a thrill of eager, excited expectation, incredulous yet oddly confident.

Somehow I seemed to know that for a second time that evening something was coming, some wild shy creature of the forest drawing nearer and nearer, gliding in ghostlike silence through the shadowy woods of the hillside above us towards the spot where we were waiting.

Utsugi, whom the Indians mistrusted, had not deceived us. Why, then, should Tsikilili, known as a lover of the truth, send a false message? It was nonsense to argue like this, I knew; but the spell of the vast, silent, darkening mountain wilderness was upon me. For the time being, logic was gone from my mind and fancy reigned. That hard, cold, skeptical, practical wisdom which we call common sense had departed, and in its place had come something akin to the primitive superstition of those copper-colored children of the forest to whom Utsugi the titmouse and Tsikilili the chickadee were not merely little birds of the woods but mysterious messengers of the woods-deities, endowed in some strange way with much hidden and curious knowledge and able, if they chose, to impart their secrets to human ears.

Doubtless in a few minutes the mood would have

passed. But for the moment it possessed me utterly, and under the spell of it I began to wonder what strange thing we were about to see—what new adventure was impending. Utsugi had brought a whitetail doe, the loveliest creature of the mountain woods. What would Tsikilili bring? What could he bring that would be as well worth seeing as Ahow'he, the slim graceful one? Then in a flash there came to mind another ancient tradition of the Cherokee, the tradition of Ahow'he Usdi, the Mythic Stag, the High Chief or Little Emperor of all the deer.

Very small is this Ahow'he Usdi, the Little Emperor, less than half as large as an adult buck of normal size. But he wears upon his head the noble antlers of a forest king, and he is master and lord of all his race, stronger and fleeter by far than the mightiest of mortal stags. Nor is he timid like the deer that most of us know, but arrogant, bold and proud; for he is swifter than the swiftest wind, and he fears no hunter because, being immortal, no arrow or bullet can harm him. Few have seen him, the Indians say, but all know that he exists; and though he is ever young, yet he is older than the hills, for he has been lord of the deer since the beginning of the world when the first of the animals came down to the earth from Galun'lati, the heavenly country, beyond the blue arch of the sky.

We waited—listening—watching. Only once had I heard the call of the chickadee, very faint and far away on the mountain. My companion had not heard it; and now it seemed to me possible that I had imagined that call, since I had been thinking of Tsikilili and wondering where he was. Slowly I turned my head, searching the short, dim vistas of the forest, so dark by now that I could see only a little distance amid the trees; and suddenly I was aware of a buck standing motionless some thirty feet away at the edge of a thicket of small, slim-stemmed saplings on the mountain side above us.

Only for half a minute did we see him; just long enough to note that he was small, apparently hardly more than half grown, and that he was watching us intently, his head held high, his whole attitude one of tense, absorbed alertness. In that brief glimpse and in the deceptive twilight of dusk, details were indistinguishable. The spreading antlers which I thought I saw and which seemed startlingly incongruous on the head of so small a stag, must have been, I presently decided, the interlacing stems and bare branches of the thicket behind him. Scarcely had my eyes lit upon him when he turned and stood broadside to us for a moment. Then, bounding high over a leaning sapling, he vanished suddenly in the gloom—so suddenly that I remembered with a little mental gasp that Ahow'he Usdi,

when he chose to do so, could make himself invisible.

He had gone and the night had come and our vigil in the woods was over because it was now too dark for human vision. But we were in no hurry to leave, and for several minutes more we waited, still thrilling with delight over the fine wildwood picture which we had just witnessed. Then, just as we had made up our minds to go, there came from the black mountain side above us one of the strangest sounds that I had ever heard in the woods, a sound which I knew instantly but which was louder and stranger than I had ever imagined this sound could be.

It was the bugle note—I do not know how otherwise to name it—of a whitetail buck; that shrill, far-carrying, indescribable call which the deer utters only rarely and which is one of the wildest sounds of the woods. So seldom is it uttered that many who know the whitetail well have never heard this call, while in very few of the many books which have been written about deer is it even mentioned. I can describe it only by saying that it is something between a loud, long-drawn “Phew” and a hissing whistle, and it is audible on a still night at a distance of fully half a mile. It resembles none of the other sounds occasionally made by the deer, having nothing in common with the ordinary snort of the startled buck or the pitiful bleating of the

wounded doe: for this sound is angry and proud and menacing, seeming to denote rage or defiance, not fear. In the solemn, deathlike stillness of those dark mountain woods that fierce, sudden, hissing, bugling cry shrilled out like a challenge.

So fierce was it, so utterly unexpected, so startling in the heavy brooding silence of the night, so palpable and bold its note of defiance that for a moment I was almost ready to believe that the buck which we had seen was about to return and offer battle. The thought passed almost as quickly as it had come; but nothing seemed incredible just then, in the eerie solitude of the wild, vast, night-enshrouded forest, with that astonishing challenge ringing in our ears. We waited, our senses keyed to the utmost, scarcely knowing what to expect; and almost at once, from the steep hillside looming over us, the sound burst forth again, as loud, as arrogant, as angry as before.

And this was only the prelude. We listened that evening to the strangest music that we had ever heard in the Overhills. Not twice only but fully twenty times that unseen buck trumpeted his defiance. Sometimes the calls came in quick succession. Sometimes intervals of several minutes elapsed during which the buck moved on along the side of the ridge; and these intervals of silence served to accentuate the loudness and fierceness of the voice

when presently it shrilled out once more, angrier and bolder than ever. Indescribably wild that voice seemed—the voice of the primeval wilderness which was old before man, its ruthless enemy, was known and which will endure long after he has vanished. But more powerfully even than the wildness of it, its strangeness gripped and held us; for this strangeness lay not only in the sound itself but in the fact that it came from a whitetail deer, an animal which we had known all our lives as not only one of the shyest and most timid but also one of the most silent of all woods creatures.

It was this that gave a quality of uncanniness to the adventure—the fact that we were witnessing or rather hearing, something which was against all precedent, something which all previous experience proclaimed impossible, something which seemed actually a violation of natural law. Others, perhaps, may have known a deer do what this deer did. To me that bugling buck of the Overhills—that bold, exultant, invisible voice crying out again and again and again from the black heights of the mountain—was not simply a new thing but a thing utterly unnatural, grotesquely incompatible with all that I had learned about deer through many years; a thing which was contrary to nature itself and which was, therefore, not merely astonishing but profoundly startling in its effect upon the mind.

A feeling more potent than amazement laid hold upon me, intensified, no doubt, by the enveloping darkness and solitude; a sense of awe, almost a conviction of unreality. I sat—and my companion also—rapt and wide-eyed and almost breathless, as one might sit in the presence of black magic.

I do not know how long that strange adventure lasted. Finally the buck passed above us around a wooded buttress of the ridge and we heard him no more. I said to myself, as we walked homeward through the dark silent forest, that Tsikilili, the truth-teller, had made good his promise. For I knew—let the reader smile if he will—that we had seen Ahow'he Usdi, the Mythic Stag, the Little Emperor of the Deer, and had heard him blow his trumpet on the hills.

MUSIC OF FAIRIES

FOR days I had been searching the tall trees for purple finches. It was the purple finch season in the garden, and the Fan Elm had hung out the innumerable purple flags with which, I sometimes fancy, it signals the wandering flocks. Not all the elms display these royal banners. The blossoms, which appear in the early spring before the leaves and cover all the terminal branches, vary greatly in color on different trees, running through many shades of brown, russet, and olive. But on the Fan Elm, so called because of its shape, the blossoms are often of a very delicate and lovely purple; and, most appropriately, the Fan Elm is the favorite of the purple finches when they come, as the first heralds of spring, to feed on the tiny fruit of the elms. They do not always come. There have been years when I saw not one of them in spite of careful searching, and when they do come, it is an event of some moment, a good omen of what the spring will bring. So, day after day, I watched the elms, and the Fan Elm most closely of all, devoting special attention to its highest branches, for in the garden the purple finch is a tree-top bird.

Yet it was not in the tree-tops that I found it. Watching a shallow, earthen bowl full of water under a fig tree near the house, I saw a bird alight on the rim of the bowl. It was a purple finch. It was the first purple finch that I had ever seen in my life. I had looked at a fair number of them in past years in the tree-tops, far up among the elm branches, amid the confusing lights and shadows of the blossom-laden twigs. But that, I now realized, was not really seeing, and it had given me no hint of the surpassing beauty of the bird. It was left for this fellow on the water bowl to show me what the purple finch really is.

He was not fifteen feet from me; the bright afternoon sun shone full upon him; and I thought, as I looked at him, that never before, amid all the infinite tints and hues of nature, had it been my good fortune to see anything of its sort more gorgeous than the rich, glossy rose-red of this bird's head, back, and breast. To one who loves birds a discovery like this is an important matter. For years afterward he remembers the time, the place, the attendant circumstances, the little thrill that the experience brought. I can see that rose-red fairy of the water bowl to-day. Ever since then I have looked for the purple finches in their season, not only for the promise of spring which they carried with them, but for their own sakes, too; and never since then have I

been content with tree-top purple finches, too far away for their magnificence to be discerned.

No bird is really known to you until you have seen it at close quarters. You may be able to identify it at a great distance by its voice or its shape or some distinctive mark, but it is not well to be satisfied with this. A yellow warbler singing in some Japanese privet trees got me out of doors early one April morning. The little golden bird, I thought, amid the lustrous, dark-green privet leaves would be a sight worth seeing, though the species is often common in the garden in spring. Before I had reached the place, the bird had moved into a cedar over which a gigantic wistaria vine, thicker at the base than a man's thigh, has twined and twisted, its luxuriant foliage gradually smothering the cedar so that many years ago the last vestige of life passed out of the tree and only its dead skeleton now supports the great vine. There I looked for my warbler, but could not find him, and was turning away when my eye was caught by a movement on the ground. An ovenbird, the first of the spring, walked daintily out from among the straight, slim boles of a little canebrake to my left.

It had not seen me, or else my immobility caused it to forget my existence within a moment or two. It came on toward me, walking very lightly—for the ovenbird does not hop—peering keenly to right

and left, making many side excursions to snap up tiny insects; and for some moments I watched it through my field glass at a distance varying from six to ten feet against a background that made the picture perfect. The ground over which the bird walked was carpeted with wistaria petals fallen from the vine above, and through this soft carpet of wistaria innumerable delicate blades of young grass were pushing upward towards the light, a feathery fringe of vivid green upon the lilac.

In such a setting even an English sparrow might shine with reflected glory, and no doubt it was largely due to the gorgeous background that the image of this ovenbird stands out so clearly in my mind. I could see its every feather, and the detail that I remember most distinctly was its golden crown. *Seiurus aurocapillus* is the ovenbird's technical name, but I had always thought that, like so many others of the Latin names of birds, this one should be taken with a grain of salt. *Aurocapillus* falls musically from the tongue and paints an attractive picture in the mind, but the ovenbirds that I had seen upon other occasions—none of them at such close quarters as in the present case—had seemed scarcely worthy of the appellation. Their crowns, I thought, were rufous or buff rather than gold, and I set down *aurocapillus* as a pleasant poetic exaggeration on the part of Linnæus, who

named the species. But this crown was real, rich, tawny gold; and gazing at it through the glass at a distance of not more than six feet, I made my apologies to Linnæus. He had engaged in no poetic license unbecoming a devotee of unemotional science. He was as sternly precise and as conscientiously accurate as science itself when he dubbed the ovenbird "golden-crowned shake-tail."

Another thing I learned that day because I had the good fortune to study that ovenbird at such close range. When he had come very near to me, and not until he was very near, I discovered that he was singing. I could see him singing before I could hear him. At ten feet the sound was inaudible. At seven feet I could just distinguish the music—as though a field mouse, hidden somewhere in the grass, were playing softly on a tiny violin such as a mouse might use if mice could do such things. That was a discovery worth while, for never before had the ovenbird been known to sing in the garden. I have never yet heard it sing its usual song there, for that song is a loud, bold melody which could not have passed unnoticed. But I learned that day that it has another song, a tiny, delicate, intricate trill which the keen ears of the little wild folk of the garden, so much keener than mine, have probably heard often enough April after April for as many years as the garden has been a garden and the oven-

birds, voyaging northward with the spring, have lingered a day or two amid its vines and shrubbery to break their long journey and rest their sturdy little wings.

It is a dangerous thing to sit among those who may be termed the negative dogmatists, those who assert positively that a certain thing never happens, that a certain bird or other animal never does thus or so. That singing ovenbird, which shattered a dogma that I would have sworn by, calls to mind another instance of the same sort, but much more notable, because in this case it is one of the great luminaries of natural history who is caught in the pitfalls of dogmatism.

"They pass in abundance through Georgia and the Carolinas early in September," says Audubon in his account of the catbird. "On their return in spring they reach the neighborhood of Charleston about the 20th of March, when they feed on insects found along the lanes and garden-walks; but none are heard to sing, or are found to breed there."

If Audubon had been standing ten minutes ago in the doorway of the room where this is being written, a doorway that looks out on a tangle of honeysuckle, and, just beyond it, a little thicket of young mulberry trees, he would have seen and heard a catbird singing in a Charleston garden as boldly and

joyously as ever a catbird sang anywhere under the sun.

It was more than two weeks ago that I first heard this gray gallant really lift up his voice, but long before that I had learned here in the garden that what Audubon said never happened happens every spring. The discovery was almost precisely similar to the ovenbird episode already described. Watching a catbird one morning, I *saw* the bird singing a song which at first I could not hear. Not until I had come within a few feet of it could my ears catch the faint sound. It was a true song, though nearly inaudible—a complex succession of notes closely resembling, I thought, the catbird's ordinary song, as though the bird were going through its usual repertoire "under its breath"; and experience proved that this was no unusual happening but that, on the contrary, the catbird makes this faint music in the garden every April and may be heard by any one who will contrive to get within a few feet of the musician without letting himself be seen.

How many other birds have this habit of singing under their breath at times and in places when and where they are not supposed to sing? A considerable number, I think, for I have caught several others at it. The cardinal does it regularly every winter. On still, sunny days in December I have often heard him in the garden crooning softly to

himself, so softly that one could not hear him half a dozen yards away. It is as though he were holding private rehearsals in preparation for his real singing season which, in the garden, generally has its beginning in late December, sometimes on Christmas morning. The mockingbird, too, holds these secret rehearsals with none except himself to listen, and trills many a faint elfin tune in the evergreen thickets long before the real spring ecstasy comes upon him. At intervals throughout the winter I hear the white-throated sparrows communing with themselves in liquid lyric numbers, although as a rule it is not until March and sometimes not until April that they lift up their sweet, plaintive voices for all to hear. Doubtless there are many other birds that do the same thing; but one must live very close to them to find them out, for the music that they make at these times is as small and fine and delicate as the music of fairies.

Most of this fairy music of the birds that I have had the luck to hear has been heard in the garden, very little of it in the woods; and this is due in no small measure to the fact that a garden offers certain special advantages for close and intimate observation. Thus every window near which grow trees and shrubs is a vantage point, a sort of ambush where a man may lie in wait, his presence unsuspected by the wild things that come and go without.

Indeed, looking back over the record of years, I am almost persuaded that a window ambush, even a window ambush in a city, is the best place in the world from which to watch wild things, provided it looks out on some green place. I have seen from my window ambushes foxes, loons, wood ibises, herons, and hawks, and I have even gone on woodcock hunts there and had fine sport—hunts in which no gun was used and which cost no lives.

“Woodcock in the city!” exclaims the reader, “what nonsense!” Which only shows that the reader still has certain things to learn. As a matter of fact, there are woodcock in my city garden and in neighboring gardens during nearly every cold wave, and during one exceptionally chilly winter at least eight or ten of these strange, big-headed, big-eyed birds spent a month there. Morning after morning I watched them from my ambush, sometimes as many as six of them together, foraging for their breakfast just below me and often not a dozen feet away; and it was a common thing to see two or three or four of them walking about unconcernedly among the hens in the chicken yard, darting quickly aside when one of the sedate Plymouth Rocks resented their intrusion.

It was a blizzard that brought them, but it was the humble earthworm that kept them. There are many earthworms in the woods, but there are not

many of them in any one place in the woods, and the colder the weather, the harder it is to find them, for they burrow deeper to keep warm. The garden, however, is a metropolis of earthworms, and, perhaps, because the temperature never goes quite so low in the city as in the country, it is not so hard a matter to discover them, even in bitter weather. The woodcock probably hit upon the garden quite by accident in their flight southward before the season's first great cold wave; but having found it and having discovered its rich store of earthworms, they could not keep away from it, and even if at first they were frightened away by the terrifying sights and sounds of the city, they soon returned to it because in that time of dearth it was a veritable land of milk and honey. So every day for some thirty days I went woodcock hunting at my window ambushes and learned more about woodcock than I had ever learned in the woods.

Sometimes one comes upon interesting secrets. A bluejay which I was watching from a window ambush last autumn had no idea that he was being spied upon. Otherwise he would not have proceeded to bury stolen treasure directly under my nose. He had a pecan nut in his bill when I first caught sight of him in the mulberry thicket outside the window, one of many nuts which he and his accomplices have stolen from the big pecan tree

in the garden; and as he perched on a twig in the shadows of the thicket, holding the nut lengthwise in his bill, he glanced keenly to right and left to make sure that he was unobserved. Presently he hopped from his twig to another nearer the ground and again peered craftily about him. After a moment, he jumped down upon the ground. Laying the nut down, he pushed and poked it into the soil with his bill until it was covered, and then, apparently to conceal the evidences of his handiwork, he picked up five or six dead leaves one by one and laid them carefully over the spot where the nut was planted.

Did he intend to return later and get that nut and eat it? I suppose he did—though, of course, we are dealing here with an instinctive and not a reasoned action; but the chances are that he will not come, for the jays cannot possibly remember all the widely scattered places where they bury nuts. Indeed, the many young pecan trees which spring up in the most out-of-the-way places are proof that a large proportion, probably the great majority, of the nuts planted by the jays remain in the ground. It is an interesting illustration of one of Nature's stratagems—of how she makes use of an instinct developed for one purpose to accomplish another and very different end. Even the jay himself—not the individual, but the species—is the gainer by the trick which she plays on him in causing him to for-

get most of the nuts and acorns which he buries so carefully; for future generations of jays are provided with bushels of nuts and acorns borne in after years by the trees which he has thus planted.

Not long ago, close to one of my window ambushes, my garden cardinals showed me a new thing, a thing unprecedented in my experience and not recorded in any book that I have read. Early in the spring, the cardinals had begun to construct a nest in a small but dense Japanese privet tree near my window. When the nest was about one-quarter completed, the birds, for some unknown reason, abandoned it and began to build another home in a hedge of Siberian privet thirty yards or so away. Here, too, they met with interference of some sort—perhaps from rats—and when the nest was nearly ready for the eggs, they abandoned it also and sought still another site. This time they chose a low spiræa bush beside a lane, where they quickly constructed a nest. The eggs were soon laid, and the female began incubating them.

Within a few days, disaster befell. One afternoon I found the nest empty, though undamaged in any way, and I concluded that either bluejays or fish crows had taken the eggs in the redbirds' absence. Undaunted, the plucky pair set to work again to construct another home in a tall Rose of Sharon or althea bush near a dense canebrake. Be-

fore the eggs were laid, this nest was broken up by thieving rats.

Redcoat and his wife trilled a few tunes to prove their superiority to adverse fortune; then they proceeded to show me something that I had never seen before. They returned to the small Japanese privet near my window where they had begun to build their first nest, and they completed the unfinished nest in that privet and reared a brood there. Not without mishaps, however. One morning, before the nestlings were fully fledged, a bluejay raided the nest, killed one nestling and would have murdered the others also had not the parent birds returned at that moment and attacked the blue ruffian. In fury, he turned upon them, seized the female cardinal by her headfeathers, and would have killed her in the grass under the tree, despite the valiant efforts of her mate, had I not rushed to the rescue.

Now, all this is not of great importance, perhaps, and yet it is an interesting illustration of the possibilities that lie in garden natural history; for cardinals and other small feathered folk very seldom return to an abandoned nest and complete it and make their home in it. Never before had I known this happen, and when I asked one of the foremost ornithologists of the country about it the other day, he declared it a unique case, so far as he was aware. The incident illustrates not only the

possibilities but also the positive advantages of garden natural history; for in the open country I could hardly have followed the fortunes of this pair of cardinals through a period of weeks and thus have discovered at the last that occasionally, though very, very rarely, the cardinal departs from the ordered custom of his race and does a thing that you will not find mentioned in any of the books that have been written about him.

I have wandered far from the subject about which I started to write—the music of feathered fairies—that faint, fine music of the birds, which they sometimes make in secret places for their own joy, imagining that none can hear it except themselves. And I shall wander away from that subject again, for there is another thing even better than this fairy music that the watcher in a window ambush may enjoy without measure or stint—the beauty and grace of the fairies themselves, off-guard and unaware of prying eyes, viewed close at hand, so close that at times you might stretch out your arm and touch them. Of them all, the painted bunting or nonpareil is the loveliest. The Northerner does not know the nonpareil. His real home is in the tropics. Even here in Carolina he is found only in the coastal country and, of course, only during the warmer part of the year. He must be seen to be believed. One can no more describe the adult

male nonpareil than one can describe the tiger lily; and when I see him in the garden in spring—and I see him almost every day at that season—I know that I would not exchange him for the wild pigeon or the sandhill crane or the great auk himself.

Yet it is not the springtime nonpareil in all his vivid panoply of the season of love that is the chief crown and glory of window ambush natural history. That distinction belongs to the autumn nonpareil, a very different bird. You need not lie in wait to see the nonpareil in May and June. In spite of what the Northern writers of books (two-thirds of whom have evidently never seen a nonpareil in their lives) say about his shyness and timidity, he is in spring and summer one of the least shy and the least timid of all the birds that come up out of the tropics to breed and rear their young in this region.

He delights in being looked at. He parades his gorgeous beauty before the eyes of the human beholder with almost as much pride as he displays when he pirouettes in front of his little olive-green sweetheart. When he pours out his love in sweet song—and for weeks after his arrival he sings almost incessantly—he chooses some conspicuous perch where the sun shines full upon him, and the glowing colors of his splendid coat fairly gleam and glitter in the light. But in late summer a change

comes over his spirit, and by early October he has become so timid and so diffident, so silent, so retiring—I had almost said so morose—that only the most industrious and painstaking search will find him in his hiding place.

It is just at this season, when he is so hard to find, that it is most important to find him; for beautiful as the springtime nonpareil is, the autumn nonpareil is still more beautiful. His colors have lost something of their brilliancy, so that at a little distance the nonpareil of October may seem not quite so splendid a creature as the nonpareil of May. But seen close at hand, the darker, more lustrous, richer plumage of the October painted bunting so astounds and entrances the eye that no man delighting in such things can ever forget his first meeting with an adult male bird of this species which has donned his new fall uniform. But the problem is to find him. Most people at this season never see him at all and suppose that he has already departed for his winter home in the tropics.

It is then that the window ambush plays its part most gloriously. If you go seeking the autumn nonpareil, the noise of your approach will frighten him away, and you may search vainly for hours. But if you will wait quietly in one place, the sort of place that he loves, he may come after a while and, if you are fairly well concealed, he will perch on

a twig and preen his rainbow plumage not ten feet in front of your nose. The best places that I know of for this autumn nonpareil hunting are two window ambushes looking out upon the garden. From these ambushes I see the autumn nonpareil in all his lustrous splendor far more frequently and to much better advantage than the man who searches for him afield and who is likely to search all day without catching even a glimpse of him. I see him under the best possible conditions, when he has not the slightest suspicion that he is being watched and is perfectly at ease; and often I see him at such close quarters that every shade and tint of his iridescent reds and blues and greens may be discerned. And this—although the Northerner, poor fellow, may not believe it—is better than seeing even the great auk or the dodo!

KINGS OF THE WATERS

WHEN we drove up to Medway House one sunny afternoon in early spring, we found the master of Medway preparing to wage war. The warm weather had brought the alligators out from their winter dens and they had begun to take their annual toll. Some of them had been shot, but the grim reptilian raiders were still a menace to the plantation hogs, and more effective measures were needed to teach them a lesson. Even wise old 'gators, which have learned how to take care of themselves against men with rifles, will often succumb to the lure of a dead gallinule or squirrel suspended a foot or so above the water with a large steel hook, attached to a length of stout rope, concealed in its carcass. It was this method which was to be employed at Medway, where, in all likelihood, it was known and used more than two centuries ago when Landgrave Smith, one of the barons of early Carolina, and sometime governor of the Province, lived in the strong brick house on Back River, the first brick house built in the vast forest that covered the whole Low Country outside of Charles Town.

If the old Landgrave were not sunk in such deep slumber in his tomb under the Medway live oaks and cedars, he might hear now and again on warm spring evenings a familiar sound—the hollow, reverberant bellowing of the big bull alligators trumpeting their love songs by the reedy shore of the winding river and along the shadowy banks of the still lagoons. It is a sound not easily described—resonant, tremulous, mournful, menacing, yet, to the understanding ear, sweeter and more grateful than any other sound to be heard to-day in the wild places of the Low Country.

This fantastic, melancholy music is a voice out of the romantic past. It is a reminder of those adventurous early days when, according to the old chroniclers, a man could scarcely sleep in the woods near one of the great swamps because of the hideous and terrifying chorus of the wild beasts. The wolf and the puma have vanished and, while the black bear and the bay lynx still survive, they are now prudently silent. The 'gator, lower in the animal scale and seemingly less fitted than these others to meet the changed conditions due to the coming of the white man, has fared better than any of them in the struggle with the new foe and still boldly lifts up his voice along the rivers and backwaters, the wildest and strangest of all the voices of the Low Country woods.

Strange as that voice is, the creature to which it belongs is stranger still. The 'gator has not received his due. He has not been invested with the glamour which has been thrown around certain other American animals. Yet, because of his size and strength, his grotesque and "prehistoric" appearance, his odd and interesting habits, and the wild, uncouth loveliness of his chosen haunts, he should appeal to the imagination as powerfully as any of the other denizens of the American forests. He is not, under ordinary conditions, dangerous to man, but neither is the grizzly bear himself as we now know him; and there was a time when the 'gator, not yet rendered cautious by sad experience of the white man's weapons, was an antagonist with whom no liberties could be taken. William Bartram, the botanist, one of the most trustworthy of the early travelers, tells how his boat was attacked by huge alligators during his journey through the South, and doubtless it is a reasonable conjecture that the long armored saurians were not much afraid of the Indians' arrows. To-day, as in the case of the grizzly, the 'gator has ceased to be a menace to human life not because he lacks strength to kill men but because he has acquired wisdom.

A big 'gator in his native wild, gliding slowly across the lagoon like a half-submerged submarine, the craggy upper half of his huge, misshapen head

and eight or nine feet of his jagged, plated back showing above the smooth surface of the water, is an impressive and memorable spectacle. Seen in the misty dimness of dawn or amid the shadows of dusk, in the fantastic yet beautiful setting of a cypress swamp gray and ghostly in its shrouds of Spanish moss, the grim black monster, forging silently through the still, wine-colored water, seems a direct and worthy descendant of some mighty dinosaur of the Jurassic inland seas. He looks appallingly formidable; and these old bull dragons of the landlocked lagoons are in truth masters of their watery domains, acknowledging no overlord except Man. In the larger rivers of the Low Country, however, through which the sea tides sweep inland for many miles, the alligator's sovereignty is less secure. Up these rivers herds of big dolphins, or porpoises as they are universally miscalled, occasionally make long voyages in quest of food or adventure; and I have often wondered what happens when these wanderers from the inlets and marsh creeks of the coast meet the saurians that live in the upper reaches of the winding waterways.

A large porpoise is nine feet long; a large alligator may be twelve feet or even more. The alligator has a more impressive array of teeth, his tail is as dangerous a weapon as his jaws, and he carries a heavy coat of defensive armor to boot. Yet

in a fight the porpoise would almost certainly win, and the reason why such encounters are so rare as to be almost unheard of probably lies in the 'gator's unwillingness to face an antagonist whom he knows to be more than a match for him. In the earlier days, when alligators were more abundant in the larger rivers and came in greater numbers down to the brackish portions of the tidal streams, there was doubtless better opportunity to observe their attitude and behavior toward the invaders from the sea coast. When Sir Charles Lyell, the great English geologist, visited America for the second time, the alligators of the South Carolina and Georgia lowlands interested him deeply, and among the notes which he made regarding them is the following, perhaps not generally known to students of alligator lore:

Mr. Couper (Lyell's host at Darien, Georgia, and a naturalist of distinction) told me that in the summer of 1845 he saw a shoal of porpoises coming up to that part of the Altamaha where the fresh and salt water meet, a space about a mile in length, the favorite fishing ground of the alligators, where there is brackish water, which shifts its place according to the varying strength of the river and the tide. Here were seen about fifty alligators, each with head and neck raised above the water, looking down the stream at their enemies, before whom they had

fled, terror-stricken, and expecting an attack. The porpoises, no more than a dozen in number, moved on in two ranks, and were evidently complete masters of the field. So powerful, indeed, are they that they have been known to chase a large alligator to the bank, and putting their snouts under his belly, toss him ashore.

If the kings of the fresh-water rivers are still subjected from time to time to this humiliating treatment by the masters of the salt-water inlets and creeks, I have never met with any man who has witnessed it, though that is hardly in itself sufficient reason for rejecting Couper's story. Probably the porpoise's marvelous skill and agility in the water and his superior swiftness would be as important as his strength in giving him a decisive advantage over his reptilian opponent. By comparison, the alligator is clumsy and slow. Thus, in capturing his prey, the 'gator simply engulfs it in his wide jaws, whereas the porpoise, racing at express-train speed, seems able to calculate almost to a hair's breadth the exact spot on the body of the small poison-finned catfish at which it must be bitten in two. Some time ago, in an article containing some notes about porpoises, I ventured to repeat a story told by a negro fisherman, who declared that a porpoise, cut off in a narrow creek, had leaped

clear over a twenty-foot scow, and thus made its escape. Although it is not unusual to see porpoises make considerable leaps out of the water when badly frightened or at play, I had never seen one compelled to utilize its swiftness and strength to the utmost in long-distance vaulting, and I was rather doubtful of the negro's story. I have still to see for myself a feat as impressive as that one, but not long since a planter of the coast, who has known porpoises all his long life and who is not a spinner of yarns, sent me the following narrative:

Two porpoises were seen to enter a long creek on high flood tide. A large wood sloop being at hand, it was fastened across the creek near the mouth. After some considerable time, the porpoises came down and repeatedly raised their heads out of the water, carefully inspecting the boat. They went back up the creek. Later they came down with a rush, the creek being in a turmoil. When near the sloop, the large one leaped out of the water and passed through the mainsail, which had been pulled up as an additional barrier. A flat ten feet wide was tied alongside the sloop. The large porpoise cleared the sloop and the flat and went free. The smaller one followed and cleared the sloop but not far enough to clear the flat. He lashed and jumped furiously, gradually tiring, until he died. The larger one—which was apparently the mother—waited outside, continually looking back for its kid,

until, hope having died, it slowly and reluctantly bobbed down the stream. It had jumped about thirty feet.

The porpoise is a common sight in the innumerable waterways that wind everywhere through the wide marshes of the Low Country coast. To the coast dweller it is one of the most familiar of all wild beasts—though he seldom thinks of it as a wild beast and can scarcely be persuaded that it is not a fish. There were no men in the world in that remote epoch when the forerunners of the porpoise underwent the slow evolutionary process through which they forsook the land altogether and made the water their home; but man was coming long ages afterward to take possession of the land, and it was the porpoise's good fortune to get off of it before the two-legged destroyer arrived. Thanks to that change from land to water far back in the dim dawn of its race history, the porpoise, although among the largest of the mammals of the Low Country, is perhaps the most abundant of them all with the exception of little fellows like the 'possum and the cottontail. The bear have been driven to the deep swamps, and the deer, though still numerous and now holding their own or increasing, no longer show themselves in droves in every woodland; but the salt creeks and rivers of the coast behind

the barrier islands and the open waters of the ocean along the lonely sea beaches are still a fairly safe hunting ground for the porpoise herds.

Not long ago I sailed up a broad beautiful marsh creek on the bank of which stands a fine old mansion where Lafayette was entertained in regal fashion by the great planters when he visited Edisto Island after the Revolution. From the windows of the house, set in a grove of handsome trees on the island shore, he might have watched the porpoises rolling and sounding in the creek before him; yet I doubt whether he saw more of them than I saw that afternoon as our launch passed by the old house toward the Edisto landing.

There were fifteen or twenty in the herd. Now here, now there, a dark curved back showed for a moment above the water as the big sea mammals pursued their undulating course. They were attending strictly to business—in other words, looking for a supper. There was no spirited dashing back and forth, no frisking about at the surface, no head-long leaping out of the water, such as one sometimes sees, especially just outside the surf of the barrier islands. But it was pleasant to watch them as, I said to myself, Lafayette might have watched them at that very spot; and they enhanced immeasurably the charm and interest of the scene as the sun dropped down behind the far-off woods of

the South Edisto swamps to the west where the deer on Jehossie Island and in the Ti-Ti jungle were bestirring themselves after a long day's rest in their safe retreats and making ready for the night's activities.

In that strange jungle of Ti-Ti, as I watched the porpoises, alligators too were stirring. Ti-Ti, with the waters round-about it, is the home of many 'gators, as, for that matter, are all the big swamps of the Low Country, swamps whose ponds and pools and sluggish watercourses, swarming with fish, never go dry even in the dryest weather. On high ground in these swamps or in the marshes or abandoned rice fields, generally near water and in some fairly open place where the sunlight can strike down through the trees, the female saurian makes her nest, scooping out a shallow depression in the sand or earth and, after the dull white eggs, which may number as many as forty, have been deposited in it, pulling dead leaves and trash over her treasures until she has made a mound two feet or so in height and about four feet in diameter. The sun performs the work of incubation, and, in this region at any rate, the process is seldom interrupted by man because comparatively few men go into the swamps in the warm season. When the cool days come and the hunters take to the woods, the young 'gators are well able to take care of themselves, and the members of

the 'gator tribe in general, big and little, are already retiring to the secret dens where they will spend the winter.

It is probably to this habit of "denning up" in the fall and remaining in seclusion until the return of the warm weather again closes his favorite haunts to all except the hardiest of human intruders that the alligator owes his survival in such large numbers in the Low Country. Occasionally an alligator may be found abroad in winter, but this is a rare occurrence and is always due to an accident of some kind. This king of the reptile race shares in the fullest measure the typical reptilian fondness for hot weather, the hotter the better. His active life is lived at a season when his watery fastnesses, steaming in the sun, are not tempting to most white men—a season when few hunters or fishermen, white or black, are inclined to spend much time on the inland rivers and lagoons or in the swamps: and this fact, even more than the wisdom and knowledge of man's ways which have somehow crept into his little brain, has helped him to hold his own in the struggle against the relentless foe of the wild creatures, so that he still lives on in goodly numbers in the Low Country to give an added touch of wildness and mystery to the beautiful, slow-flowing, serpentine rivers of the old plantation region, so

rich in story and legend, and to the teeming waters of the swamp ponds and lagoons.

Only occasionally do the alligators come down the rivers to the salt creeks and inlets close to the sea where the dolphins are at home. When they do come, they sometimes cause consternation among the negroes of the coast, less accustomed to the big reptiles than their brethren of the inland fresh-water country. Not long ago a 'gator, which had traveled downstream in time of freshet, appeared in the midst of some boys and girls bathing on the shore of a large river near its mouth. It was only a small 'gator, but when it darted between the legs of a little colored boy swimming in the water the boy collapsed in a faint. Upstream, in alligatorland, the plantation negroes, while they will not go swimming in 'gator ponds, know the saurians too well to be much afraid of them. The white man treats them with still less respect; yet under certain conditions the most timid of 'gators may become a menace to life and limb. It is not a good plan to approach too close to the jaws or tail of a wounded 'gator, and the man who places himself directly between a big saurian and his watery refuge assumes considerable risk.

One day last spring, in an old plantation house near the Santee, I sat in a chair from which, it might almost be said, Francis Marion, the Swamp

Fox of the Revolution, leaped full tilt into the waters of a wide creek which was and is a famous 'gator haunt. While his troopers had ridden on some distance through the woods, he had stopped at the house and asked for a cup of coffee; and tradition says that he was resting in one of the downstairs rooms, sitting in one chair with his feet cocked up on another, when a negro rushed in.

"De Redcoats! De Redcoats!" cried the panting black; and through the windows they could see the glint of steel along the edge of the woods across the wide lawn. Out of the back door sped the Swamp Fox and down the path to the creek a hundred yards or so behind the house. Whether it was the season of alligators I do not know, but, even if it was the very heart of summer, it is highly improbable that the thought of hidden dangers in the creek waters ever entered Marion's mind. He had been reared among 'gators and knew them well; the mightiest saurian of the Santee was an angel of light compared with Tarleton; and the swampy island-wilderness beyond the creek, an alligator-stronghold, seemed at that moment as lovely as the Promised Land. So, thinking of Redcoats behind him rather than of 'gators in front of him, the Swamp Fox plunged in, swam the creek, and lived to fight many another battle.

Over and over again, since the earliest days of

deer hunting in the Low Country, the hunted deer have taken the same chance that the hunted patriot leader may have taken that day. Writing to his son John, in October, 1774, Elias Ball, of Kensington Plantation told how "a stout Buck" was started by Joseph Bell, who "gave him a long chase; at length he took the river and came where Stepney was minding rice, and he heard a noise in ye river, he looked about him and there he saw this stout Buck; up he startes and runs up to Cupid, who immediately went and got a shot, and Laced him from stem to stern." The Wednesday following another "stout fellow" was roused, "and he came Blundering down ye River as ye other had done." A man on the bank saw him coming but had no shot for his gun; so he "broke his Pipe in pieces and put that in his gun and got so close to the Buck as to shoot him in his ear, and got him; and just as I came home . . . lo, he came swaggering with him. I do assure you, John, he was a stout fellow, much stouter than the other."

To-day in the Low Country, where the deer are hunted with dogs just as they were hunted then—though they are seldom killed nowadays with fragments of the hunter's pipes!—the "stout Bucks" sometimes take to the water to elude the pack even in the early autumn weeks of the hunting season when the 'gators are still abroad in large numbers.

Yet, although a big alligator is amply powerful enough to crush a buck's bones, I have never met with a hunter who had witnessed such a tragedy.

The hounds are in greater danger. The alligators seem to consider dog meat a special delicacy, and many a too venturesome leader of the pack has been dragged under, never to emerge. Once gripped in those terrible jaws, there is scarcely a chance of escape; yet I heard only the other day of a plucky hound that saved himself after he had all but descended into a big 'gator's maw.

The dog had not returned after a deer hunt, and the hunters, unable to wait for him longer, pushed off across a river that lay between them and home. They were in midstream when Butler appeared on the river bank and, seeing the boat headed the other way, plunged in and began swimming after it. Well out from shore, a big alligator seized him. The hunters saw the reptile pull him under and gave him up for lost, but, to their surprise and relief, he bobbed up again after some moments and swam ashore, not much the worse for his experience. The eye is the alligator's Achilles' heel, the tenderest, most vulnerable spot on his body; and Butler's owner believed that the dog, a large and powerful animal, struggling frantically in the grip of his assailant under water, bit or scratched the monster in the eye and thus won his freedom.

On another hunt in September the pack jumped a large buck, which soon took to water, swimming across an abandoned ricefield converted by the heavy rains into a lake. A hunter rode around to the other side of the ricefield to stop the dogs, which appeared in a few minutes, all of them swimming. One hound, however, was missing, and in a moment the hunter heard him yelping about two hundred yards distant, crying out as if in great pain and fear. Riding along the ricefield bank, he presently saw the dog some thirty feet away in the water. The hound, his head and neck above the surface, was struggling desperately as though trying to free himself from something which held his body fast.

Dismounting quickly, the hunter laid his gun on the bank and waded as swiftly as he could to the dog's rescue. It did not occur to his mind that he might need his weapon, his first thought being that the hound had placed his foot in a steel trap set by some negro when the ricefield was partly dry. He had forgotten, however, that a dog held by a trap will almost invariably try to bite anyone who approaches, and the frantic creature's snapping jaws prevented him from laying hold of it. Wading back to the bank, he cut a long stout stick with a crotch at the end, and with this he probed in the mud beneath the terrified animal. As well as he

could make out, a submerged log was responsible for the hound's predicament, and, placing the end of his pole against the log, he pushed it vigorously.

This method brought results. Almost immediately the dog was released and struck out for the shore; and the next moment the "log" also rose to the surface—an alligator which, to the startled hunter, standing within a yard of it, probably seemed fully fifteen feet from nose to tail tip, though in reality it was just seven and a half feet in length. At all events, it was a very truculent, a very stupid, or a very sluggish 'gator. Instead of vanishing instantly on finding itself at such close quarters with a man, it remained motionless on the surface staring at the hunter, and it never moved while he waded to the bank, returned with his gun, and proceeded to blow a hole in the saurian's head with a load of buck shot.

Life swarms, during the warm season, in both the fresh and salt waters of the Low Country. When we wanted some silver fish for black bass bait at Wappaolah Plantation the other day, the first cast of a six-foot net in an old ricefield canal brought up, in addition to many "shiners," eleven perch and nine catfish. The alligators, which are almost omnivorous, vary their usual fare of fish whenever the opportunity offers, ducks, other waterfowl, and small mammals being swallowed whole;

but the feathered and furred denizens of the salt-marsh creeks need fear no such fate, the porpoises confining themselves to a fish diet.

It is often a fine and spirited sight to watch them at their hunting. Seventy feet upstream from our little square-nosed bateau the placid surface of the winding marsh creek suddenly heaved and swirled. Next moment the waters divided, and three large dark objects, shaped somewhat like torpedoes, came rushing side by side down the creek. Snatching up the paddles, we struck them sharply five or six times against the sides of the boat. The porpoises might capsize us if they collided with our punt, for they were moving at high speed and they were so intent at the moment on their own affairs that we were not sure they would see us. On they came, swimming almost abreast, their smooth, curved backs showing well above the surface of the stream; and all about them, as they rushed towards us, hundreds of silvery-white fish, six or eight inches long, flashed upward from the surface, curved through the air, and rained down again into the water.

The porpoises had overtaken a large school of mullet, a school which seemed to fill the wide creek from shore to shore and from bend to bend. So swiftly were they moving, that in a few seconds more they would have struck the bateau, and, although they would probably have seen us in time,

it is possible that only our vigorous rapping with the paddles saved us from collision. At any rate, they dived when they were about fifteen feet from us, passing nearly under the boat and swerving out toward the deeper water of the channel, and when they came up again, they were two hundred feet away down the creek.

A little later, when we had dropped downstream to another fishing place, we saw them again; and now they no longer hunted alone. As they rushed along through the marginal water, sending the mullet flying above and around them in a silver rain, a laughing gull hovered close overhead; while along the soft muddy bank sloping down from the marsh, a great blue heron, half as tall as a tall man, hopped and flapped in desperate haste, trying to keep pace with the swift sea monsters that were making such a commotion in the quiet creek.

He was a remarkable spectacle, that heron. All his accustomed dignity was gone. His long legs seemed to get in his way as he stumbled forward, and his wide wings belabored the mud as he strove to keep his balance. It was easy to see why he was in such a hurry. His object was the same as the gull's, and he was afraid that the latter would get ahead of him. Some of those panic-stricken mullet, leaping helter-skelter out of the water in front of the charging porpoises, were likely to leap in the

wrong direction and fall upon the shore, and it was a question whether the heron or the gull would reach them first. Which of these two satellites of the porpoise pack outdid the other I do not know, for in a moment the chase swept around another curve of the creek and the tall marsh grass hid them from view.

LANIUS THE VALIANT

HERE was a derisive twinkle in the eye of that brown and white pigeon of unpleasant memory as he gazed down at me from the roof of the house. I could not see the twinkle, but I felt sure of its existence. War prevailed between that pigeon and myself. It was his custom to come down into my garden and consume the chicken feed which I scattered in the grass for the benefit of the cardinals, white-throated sparrows and brown thrashers; and because of the high cost of chicken feed, I had been doing my best to repel these raids and make the garden an exceedingly disagreeable place for him and for the other pigeons that he often brought with him to the feast.

It was a one-sided struggle. I had scarcely driven the marauder off when he was back again, and usually he retreated no further than the roof of the house, perching there at his ease until I went away and then returning promptly to his repast. Sometimes on his high perch he made guttural noises in his throat as if he were chuckling at me while I glared up at him from below; and on this morning in particular his whole attitude and expression

seemed so impudent and insulting that I thought more than once of the rifle which I had so far refrained from using against him. This feud was going to call for bloodshed in the end, I felt, and the blood letting might as well come soon as late. I had almost made up my mind to go into the house and get the gun when something delightful happened.

A little feathered thunderbolt, coming from behind, struck the pigeon squarely between the shoulders. It struck him without warning and with terrific force and it knocked him clear off the roof of the house in the midst of a little cloud of feathers. He had fallen several feet through the air before he recovered his balance and his wits; and then he sped away on swiftly beating wings, as though the most ferocious of duck hawks were close behind him. The loggerhead shrike that had used him as a target went on about his business without acknowledging in any way the applause and thanks which I sent after him.

Now loggerheads do not make a practice of assaulting pigeons. The pigeon is too big a bird for the loggerhead to kill, being several times as large as the shrike; and this shrike, when he hurled himself upon the brown and white pigeon on the roof, certainly had no thought of killing and eating him. Indeed, there was no practical purpose whatever to

be served by the attack upon the pigeon, and I do not think that any such motive as revenge could have inspired the shrike, for pigeons do not in their daily lives perpetrate any wrongs upon the loggerheads of the garden. I think that this loggerhead happened to be passing that way and chanced to see the pigeon sitting on the edge of the roof, with his back turned and in such a position that a smart blow from behind would certainly knock him from his perch, and that the loggerhead simply could not resist the temptation.

There is much that is human in the character of Lanius the shrike, and it is because of these human qualities that one cannot help liking him in spite of his shortcomings. Moreover, there are certain practical considerations in his favor. In the summer heats is launched the supreme offensive of the insect hosts, those deadly foes of mankind, more formidable enemies of our race than the cave-bear and the sabre-toothed tiger ever were. Waxing stronger with the warmth which brought them into being, they seek to possess the earth. Unseen for the most part, nevertheless they are everywhere. In the fields, in the meadows, in the woods, their incalculable legions swarm, waging merciless war on the crops, on the trees, and on all the green life-giving things that make the world lovely and habitable.

Against these destroying foes—foes of a thousand different sizes and kinds and shapes and hues—are ranged the armies of the birds, man's allies in the unending struggle for existence. These also are of many sizes and kinds; but the birds which prey upon the larger insects are comparatively few; and it is for that reason that *Lanius*, the loggerhead shrike, stands out as a very paladin among the feathered warriors. He wars against the largest of the insect enemies. He chooses as his especial victims those members of the hostile phalanxes which are too big for most of the winged insect-eaters. Nature has given him a strong hooked bill like that of the hawk, and with this weapon he can crush the armor of even the best protected of his six-legged antagonists. Among these he does terrible execution, killing more victims than he can possibly consume and hanging their bodies up on thorns and sharp twigs, as in the buccaneer days the seaport towns hung the bodies of pirates in chains at their harbor mouths.

Hence if you study *Lanius* the loggerhead in late summer you will see him at his best, when he is engaged in a great and beneficent work of conservation, for which he is entitled to mankind's sincerest gratitude. He is, too, in fine spirits then, for he is living on the fat of the land and has nothing to worry about. But presently a change comes over him. Into his heart the first fall weather

seems to inject a strange discontent which shows itself in the form of discordant gurglings and rasping calls most unpleasant to the ear? I have watched him in my garden just at the turn of the year and have often wondered at his autumnal metamorphosis. To many of the other birds the coming of autumn is evidently welcome, putting new life into them, driving away their late summer melancholy, and even calling forth from some of them music not very far inferior to that with which they greeted the coming of the spring. Not so with Lanius the shrike.

For him the death of summer is no occasion for rejoicing. While mockingbird and cardinal lift up their voices in praise of the new season, Lanius lifts up his to utter calls that sound suspiciously like curses. Why, indeed, should he rejoice that summer is over? Is it not the season of plenty, the time when a meal of grasshoppers may be had for the picking up? The loggerhead is a bird of much intelligence as birds go. He knows a thing or two, and he is not easily fooled. This briskness of the air and this cool breeze from the north are all very well and pleasant enough, so long as they do not get too brisk and too cool. But that is exactly what is going to happen, and Lanius the loggerhead is painfully aware of the fact. He knows as well as the weather man himself that, as sure as fate, winter

will follow fast upon these bracing autumn days; and when he thinks of the harder times coming with the cold, he loses patience with those short-sighted mockingbirds who go into raptures over the first taste of fall.

The loggerhead, as I have said, is a pretty sensible fellow. He is the wisest, I think, of all my garden birds except the fish crow and perhaps the blue jay, whose wisdom is more akin to craftiness; and he has one grievance against mankind which, of itself, is quite sufficient to put him out of humor now and then. He is pictured invariably as a murderer and practically a cannibal. The books are full of tales in which he plays the villain; and he is called "butcher bird" and is accused of slaughtering many small warblers and finches in a most barbarous manner. Many years of more or less intimate acquaintance with the loggerhead have convinced me that he does considerably more good than harm. He kills a number of myrtle warblers and other small native birds, especially in winter, but these lapses from the ways of righteousness are more than atoned for by the vigorous warfare which he wages against many noxious forms of insect life.

Moreover—and here is a great point in his favor—he has the blessed gift of personality. It is with birds as with men. A man or a bird may be a rascal through and through and yet have so winning a

way that, for all his rascality, we cannot help loving him. Lanius does not take one's heart by storm like the wren or the oriole, but he possesses traits that compel respect. Except in autumn when he falls into the dumps, he is rather a pleasant sort of fellow to have around. He is not one of those that spring into instant favor with a sweet and rollicking tune or with the flashing of bright colors in the trees; but there is much that is pleasing in the bird, in his carriage and demeanor, in his everyday behavior.

Thus there is a dignity about him very rare among the smaller birds. He is no flighty, restless fellow, flitting aimlessly here and there, and working himself into a fever of excitement when a cat comes slinking through the grass. Nor is he a brawler and a bully like the mocker and the kingbird, though he is every inch a fighter when it comes to a fight and more than a match for any other bird of his size. Calmness and self-possession are his in marked degree; and I do not think there is a braver heart among all the little feathered people.

I like to watch him as he sits in the sunshine on the topmost twig of a certain young hackberry. He seldom turns his head, yet I know that he is keeping a sharp lookout on the world. A male nonpareil, splendid in his almost incredibly gorgeous livery, perches on a limb not thirty feet distant, singing his sweet and drowsy little lay; and Lanius, silent and

motionless on the summit of his tree, seems to listen to the music.

Suddenly his place is empty. His small, quick-moving wings drive him like a bullet through the air. Yonder, above the low brick wall of a neighboring yard, his mate flutters up and down, uttering short, shrill cries in rapid succession. Even to a dull human ear it is plain that those are cries of distress.

Behind her, among the vines covering the bricks, are the baby shrikes that left the nest only yesterday. They are still very small, and their little wings will carry them only a few feet at a single flight. Danger threatens them now, for a big gray tom cat crouches on the wall, his cold eyes mere slits of yellowish green. He has not seen the young birds yet, but he knows that they are there among the vines, and he advances slowly in spite of the frantic mother who flutters about his head, keeping just out of reach of his deadly claws.

Suddenly the cat finds two black and gray foes in front of him, dancing up and down in the air, threatening his eyes, darting in and out again before he can lay them low with a sweep of his armed paw. Their swift feints and attacks bewilder him. He pauses to consider, crouching close to the bricks, ears flattened, furry fore-limb half-lifted to strike. Now and again, as one of the parent birds holds

him at bay, the other flits over towards a large oleander bush a few yards from the wall, still crying loudly but in a different key.

The fledglings seem to know the meaning of those calls. First one, then another, then a third, they launch into the air, trusting unwillingly to their tiny wings; and as they go the cold green eyes seem to glitter with something fiercer than disappointment. . . . And after a while, if you will look up at the top of the young hackberry again, there you will see Lanius the father, cool and self-possessed as ever, keeping a sharp lookout upon the perilous world.

THE WHIMSICAL GODDESS

A NEGRO man walked briskly along a rice-field bank at Twickenham Plantation, in the green Carolina Low Country. A little distance away some other negroes were repairing a road, and, while they worked, three or four of the little mongrel dogs that almost all Low Country negroes possess were trailing a rabbit in the swampy thickets. Suddenly the man on the ricefield bank, his eyes glaring with terror, yelled with all the force of his lungs and staggered back, clasp- ing in his arms a clawing, spitting wildcat.

Now that was an occurrence so extraordinary, so utterly amazing, that it might well be called a miracle of nature. You may search the books of natural history and of sport from cover to cover, and in those that are of good repute you will find very few, if any, precedents for the thing that I have just related. Yet this thing happened. It may never have happened before and it may never happen again, but it happened this time; and, miracle of nature though it was, the way of its happening was simple enough when one came to study it out.

The dogs trailing the rabbit jumped a wildcat or bay lynx in the thickets. The cat, hearing the voices of the men who were repairing the road, ran in the opposite direction. This brought it almost at once to the ricefield bank. Along that narrow parapet, thickly grown with bushes and reeds, it bounded swiftly, and ran full tilt into the negro, in all likelihood landing fairly on the man's chest. Neither was aware of the other until the moment of collision, and then it was too late, for instantly man and wildcat, equally terrified, were locked in close embrace. The negro, never doubting that he was being attacked by a furious wild beast, believed that his one chance lay in throttling it, so he crushed the lynx to his breast with arms of steel, screaming as few men have ever screamed before. Within a few minutes the men who had been working on the road reached him, yet by that time his shirt had been torn to shreds and all the lower parts of his body were bloody. But he kept his deadly grip on the cat to the end, and the rescuing party killed it.

Here is something for the slaves of rule and rote to gnash their teeth about. There is no more firmly established rule in the books than the rule that the wildcat never attacks man, and it is virtually an axiom that all tales of desperate encounters between men and wildcats are false. Yet here is one tale of such an encounter which is not false but true;

and all the dozens of authorities who have affirmed that no wildcat ever yet sprang upon a man cannot alter the fact that this wildcat did spring upon this man—though most unwillingly.

The incident is memorable, not mainly for the sake of its fine dramatic quality, or even primarily because it is a matter of interest to naturalists and to all who care about the lore of wild things, but because it is so excellent an illustration of the infinite variety, not merely of the forms, but of the very soul of Nature. Rules and laws we may lay down concerning her, setting forth that Nature does thus and so, that this is her way, her chosen custom, her immemorial usage. But she will shatter now and then the most firmly fixed of those rules; she will disobey now and then the most sacred axioms of the books; once in a while, as if just for the fun of it, she will laugh the most learned of her interpreters to scorn. For she is a whimsical goddess when all is said and done; and therein lies, for all who are in any true sense her lovers, half at least,—the dearer, more precious half,—of her mystical, ageless charm.

One June morning, while exploring the jungle-like woods on one of the islands that fringe the Low Country coast, I was suddenly aware of danger. Cottonmouth moccasins were all around me. To the right was a big, thick-bodied, wicked-looking

fellow, half concealed by a tuft of grass; to the left was another, lying arrogantly in the open on the warm sand; ahead were two more, under a small cassena bush; and, glancing back, I saw that I must have come within a foot or two of stepping on one of the ugly reptiles as I passed, unconscious of peril, into the very midst of them.

The discovery brought a thrill by no means pleasant. The danger seemed virtually over now that I was aware of the snakes' presence, for henceforward I would watch my steps carefully until I was away from the place. But it had been too narrow an escape to look back upon with any sense of enjoyment; and my heart was still beating a little faster than usual when I discovered that close to my foot, close enough, I thought, to strike me if it chose, lay another big, brown, mottled cottonmouth which until that instant I had not seen. I jumped away quickly, and perhaps rashly, since it was scarcely safe to move at all in that reptilian headquarters without first scanning carefully the spot on which one planned to place his foot. Then, seizing a stick which lay within reach, I leaned over and with three or four strokes killed the snake that had given me such a scare.

Up to this moment all the moccasins round about me—and there were eight or ten of them within view, and undoubtedly others amid the vines and

fallen palmetto branches—had lain passive, or had merely crawled sluggishly about their business. But no sooner had I killed this serpent than the one lying nearest it raised its hideous, diamond-shaped head, opened his wide jaws till I could see the white lining within that gives the cottonmouth its name, and started for me.

I still held my stick, and it was a good stout one. There could be no appreciable danger unless I took to my heels, in which case I might step on some hidden reptile and be bitten. So I simply waited until the snake, with lifted head and swiftly vibrating tail, had crossed the strip of sand eight or ten feet wide which it had to traverse before it came within reach; and then, without moving from my tracks, I killed it as I had killed the other. I looked about me, not without some nervousness, to see whether there were to be more attacks; and presently, feeling that I had had my fill of herpetology for one day, I left the place very discreetly, poking about with my stick to make sure that no assassin lurked in the weeds and grass through which I must make my passage.

Why did that moccasin of the island jungle attack me? For that it did attack me there is not a particle of doubt, and it was not the moccasin's fault that it lacked speed enough to get within the guard of my stick before I could strike it down. I

have never known any other snake to make deliberately and of its own choice an attack upon a human being. One hears tales, it is true, of snakes charging viciously from ambush; but these are either pure inventions or products of lively imaginations working at fever-heat under the stimulus of the strange, tingling panic which the mere sight of a snake of any sort so often engenders. Our North American serpents are not an aggressive race in their behavior toward man. Even the great diamond rattler, the bravest of them all, contents himself with a defiant defensive. Almost any of the snakes, of course, will fight if cornered—almost any of them except the dangerous-looking spreading adder, feared by most people as among the deadliest of all the crawling tribes, but in reality as harmless as a new-born babe. Also, there are many snakes which, suddenly finding themselves in close proximity to a human foot or leg, will lunge at it quickly before gliding away; but that, of course, is not at all the same thing as a deliberate attack such as the one which I have described.

Was the first snake that I killed the mate of the other, which thereupon gave up its own life in a gallant attempt to avenge the murder? That is a good sentimental theory, and it is the theory that many would adopt unhesitatingly; but there are difficulties in the way of that explanation, and I

am slow to indorse it. Perhaps in sober truth there is no explanation at all, save simply that this was another whim of Nature, that whimsical goddess. Nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine of the cottonmouth moccasins she has made would have retreated slowly or, at least, have left me alone. But she had made the ten-thousandth one of sterner stuff, to show me that day in the island woods the vanity of dogmatism, and to remind me that she is her own mistress after all.

There was—and I hope still is—a sharp-shinned hawk with whom I had some acquaintance, who might in much the same sense be termed the ten-thousandth sharp-shinned hawk. He came to my garden one winter, as others of his kind had been coming every winter; welcome arrivals always, for at least three reasons: first, because the sharp-shinned hawk, or blue darter as he is sometimes more appropriately called hereabouts, is a perfect expression of his type, so wonderfully and so beautifully made for his appointed work in the world, that the dullest mind must recognize him as a masterpiece; second, because his favorite food when he comes to the garden is the English sparrow; and third, because the sight of a hawk of any kind here in the city brings with it always a vision of the

countryside, and that is a pleasant experience for the mind, as if a fresh, sweet wind blew through it.

When I first saw this hawk perched on the naked topmost branch of the tall elm which is the chosen watch-tower of the hawks that visit the garden, I noticed nothing to distinguish him from all the others of his species that I had known. He seemed no larger than the average; he was as slim and rakish-looking as any other, but no more so; he had the same air of alertness, but in no greater degree than the normal. Yet, as time proved, this sharp-shinned hawk was such a one as had never visited the garden before in all my long experience of the spot. The others that I had known were just the everyday sort, the norm, the type of the race. This one was a d'Artagnan among ordinary bravos, a white-plumed Henri Quatre among common kings, a Grahame of Claverhouse, a Rupert, a Murat.

He had not been about the place long before he gave me a hint of his quality. A flock of English sparrows foraging on the lawn suddenly took fright and fled helter-skelter into a thicket of privet near by. I knew what that meant, for I had seen the same performance many times repeated; and I said to myself, meanwhile glancing up to see the hawk, "Brother Blue Darter, you were too slow that time." Every sparrow had reached the thicket, and nine times out of ten the little vagabonds are safe when

once they have gained the shelter of those closely interlacing branches.

But this time I—and doubtless they also—reckoned without sufficient knowledge of our hawk. Down like a little thunderbolt he came, all in the twinkling of an eye and in far less time than I have taken to tell it. The last sparrow was scarcely under cover before the hawk was at the thicket's green edge. I saw him swerve slightly just before reaching the outermost barrier of twigs, and the next instant he was within the thicket itself and fairly in among the sparrows. Above the fluttering of wings I heard a shrill cry; and when in a moment the hawk emerged, he bore a tousled little gray body clutched in his sharp talons.

That was the neatest raid and altogether the most skillful piece of work of its sort that I had ever seen. It set this hawk apart at once as one whose activities would be worth watching; for he had done what I had never seen one of these hawks do before—he had outwitted the sparrows at their own game and on their own ground, following them into their fortress, twisting and turning with extraordinary skill and address through its maze of twigs and branches, and carrying out the whole manœuvre so adroitly that there was scarcely any disturbance of the thicket's foliage, and, except for

the fluttering of the frightened sparrows' wings, there was no sound.

Usually the hovering or swooping hawk, perceiving that the sparrows on which he had his eye have gained the thicket's shelter, gives them up as lost and passes on in search of others less wary. Occasionally, if he is very close upon the quarry, I have seen a hawk smash head-on into the thicket after the fleeing finches, either unable to check his descent in time or else actually trying to break his way through the stiff barricade of twigs by the force of the impact. But these smashing assaults, though fine and spirited spectacles for the onlooker, are seldom fruitful of results. The hawk usually gets more or less tangled up in the twigs; in the moment or two which he requires to extricate himself, the sparrows have left for parts unknown; and Mr. Blue Darter, in spite of all the fine fury of his charge and all the commotion he has caused, presently takes himself off empty-handed, and probably in very bad humor.

I wondered whether my d'Artagnan of blue darters would repeat his exploit—whether it was really an indication of exceptional talent or merely a *tour de force*. He repeated it several times to my knowledge, and doubtless many times when I did not chance to see him; and I find in some notes which I put down at the time concerning his

achievements and methods that for a period of several weeks the English sparrows disappeared almost completely. Indeed, my notebook is not needed to recall that memorable fact. It was something unique in the garden's history, and it was due entirely to this blue darter's unparalleled effectiveness as an engine of destruction.

It is only by luck, as in this instance, or else by diligent searching, that one comes across a case of marked individuality as striking as that of the hawk whose deeds are here celebrated. The outstanding individual is lost sight of among the common run; and if you are fortunate enough to meet with him and record his doings, you may be called a Münchhausen for your pains. Nor can the world be blamed for being skeptical, for indeed it has need of caution in such matters. There is a strong temptation to make heroes out of animals upon very flimsy evidence, which is all very well if one is writing an animal novel, but not at all well if one is trying to write sober natural history. A real hero—in the sense of unusual efficiency—I believe this memorable blue darter of the garden was, for I saw him often during a considerable period and could compare him with many others studied in the same place and under the same conditions. But this is one of very few instances of the sort in my ex-

perience. Certainly the island moccasin was no hero in this meaning of the word, but a fool whose folly cost him very dear.

The observer, coming upon some apparent case of exceptional physical or mental achievement in the wild world of Nature's creatures, must go slowly in drawing conclusions. What may seem, upon a casual or limited acquaintance, to be unusual courage or skill or intelligence in some mammal or bird may be, in reality, nothing of the sort, but simply the result of circumstances of the moment, imperceptible to, or at least not perceived by, the observer. The negro on the ricefield bank, when the wildcat leaped upon him, would have taken oath that here was a wildcat with courage enough to attack a man; yet that Twickenham wildcat was as much of a coward as wildcats in general are. Nature, the fanciful goddess, was in jocund mood that morning. She lurked in the green thickets of Twickenham, and her bright eyes were mischievous and merry. It may be that the day or the hour before she had made a shattering earthquake in Asia or had sent a great forest in Canada roaring to destruction in a red inferno of towering flame; but now her humor was light and gay, she must have a bit of fun. So, at a stamp of her foot, there came about that amazing, almost incredible encounter on the ricefield bank—for all its strange-

ness, nothing more than the perfectly natural result of an unusual combination of circumstances, an extraordinary sequence of events. Here, despite appearances, was no animal hero, no Bayard among wildcats. Here, simply, was Nature, that "beautiful, wayward Undine," playing a prank for the fun of it, laughing slyly the while amid the green sheltering leaves.

For the benefit of some gray squirrels which had taken up their abode in the garden, I had placed a stout box, with a hole in its end, about twenty feet up in a cedar tree. That was in autumn; and the following spring—the squirrels apparently not caring for the box, perhaps because its doorway was too large to suit their taste—I conceived the suspicion that it had become a domicile for rats. So I sent Ben Goff, colored factotum and remarkably spry for one who recalls the bombardment of Fort Sumter, up into the tree to investigate.

The quest was almost fatal for Ben. He peered into the hole in the end of the box and nearly fell out of the tree. Ben is not lacking in respect for the recorded wisdom of the ages, but he prefers the evidence of his own senses every time. Neither science nor reason could convince him that the animal which he had seen in the box was not a pig. It might be true, he agreed, that no pig as yet known

to philosophy was equipped for climbing trees or for flying. Nevertheless, he maintained with all the emphasis of unshakable conviction that a pig had somehow entered that box twenty feet up in the cedar, and was at that instant lying in the box with its head facing the entrance and its jaws wide open.

I doubt whether he was ever fully persuaded of his error; for when I had climbed the tree and looked cautiously into the the box and discovered that its occupant was a 'possum, I was too much pleased at the discovery to disturb the animal's siesta any further and thus run the risk of making him discontented with the garden as a home. How he had come there through miles of city streets was, and still is, a mystery, but I wanted him to remain. For he too brought that vision of the quiet woods that is so refreshing to the spirit; and it was very pleasant to know that, here in the heart of the city, even some of the shy four-footed woods folk might sometimes come and go unknown to the world of men.

So I left him in peace, and doubtless in a few minutes he was once more asleep and enjoying his long nap, which probably lasted till dark. Though I never saw him again by day, he lived in and about the garden all that spring and summer, fairly prosperous, very unobtrusive, and for a long time doing no harm to anyone. There were hens in the chicken-

yard that he might have raided, but he never did so. He was content, it seemed, to regale himself each night upon the contents of the garbage-cans of the neighborhood; an easy and unadventurous life, its even tenor disturbed only occasionally by my dog who, coming upon him now and then between sunset and sunrise, compelled him to ascend some convenient tree or fence rather more rapidly than comported with the 'possum's lazy and leisurely habits.

But after a while my vegetable patch in the backyard began to suffer. It seemed reasonable to suspect Br'er 'Possum; and when the Airedale's excited barking announced that he had "treed" the midnight wanderer again, I got a light, went to the spot, and, without injuring him at all, took the suspect into custody. I would keep him prisoner over night, I thought, and then, by examining the vegetable patch in the morning, establish his guilt or innocence. He was "playing 'possum" when I placed him in a small patent chicken-coop of galvanized iron, feigning death after the strange manner of his kind; and when I left him he was curled up in the coop, never moving a limb or even an eyelid, though the ruse was imperfect, since, watching him closely, one could see the slight movement of his flanks as he breathed. He was as much alive as I was when I bade him good-night; yet in the morning he was dead.

Why did he die? A novelist neighbor to whom the question was put declared instantly that it was a clear case of a broken heart. There spoke the romantic temperament, as was right and proper in a novelist; but this is natural history, not romance. Some mammals and some birds have been known to die of fright; but of all quadrupeds on this continent the 'possum is the last of which this might be expected. He is the sole survivor in North America of an ancient race, masters of the world at one time far back in geological history, but long since surpassed, conquered, and superseded by higher forms of life everywhere save in Australia. There the primitive and antiquated marsupial family continued to flourish in great abundance and variety even down to our own day, because Australia was cut off by the sea from the Asiatic mainland at about the time when the marsupials were at the height of their glory, and those of them inhabiting that vast island were thus saved from competition with the more highly developed, more aggressive mammalian types that presently took possession of the rest of the world and gradually supplanted all the marsupials in it except our 'possum and certain cousins of his in Central and South America. Hence, of all the four-footed inhabitants of this continent, the 'possum stands lowest in physical structure; and since the most highly organized ani-

mals—as the biologists phrase it—are the most high-strung, the most sensitive, the most subject to nervous shock, a 'possum should be the very last of all to flicker out as a result of the impact of some unaccustomed, frightening experience upon his nervous system or upon his crude, slow-functioning rudiment of a mind.

Experience confirms this reasoning. It would be hard to imagine anything that ought to be more terrifying to the victim, anything better calculated to freeze the very marrow of his bones, than a typical 'possum hunt. Probably there is no other form of the chase practised in America which in this respect can be compared with it. You must put yourself in the victim's place. For the hunted 'possum the end does not come suddenly in the form of a bullet from some hidden foe lurking in ambush, or even as the climax of a swift flight through the woods before pursuing hounds and horsemen. Slow, lumbering creature that he is, he must take to a tree when the clamor of the dogs draws near in the night; and he huddles helpless on a branch while beneath him bedlam reigns, the yells of the negroes and the yelping of their curs resounding all about him, and the flaring torches—which the wild things fear most of all the deviltries of man—obliterating the friendly darkness.

And this is but the prelude. He will be taken

alive if the hunters can contrive it, so that he may be fattened for the feast. Presently he is either shaken out of the tree by some agile negro who climbs up into it, or else the tree is felled and he falls with it, clutching wildly at its branches. The eager dogs are upon him in an instant, but even this is not the end. Rescued from their jaws, he is either thrust into a sack or else is borne through the woods suspended, head down, from a split stick snapped on to his tail in such a way as to hold him helpless. In such fashion as this have countless 'possums come to the end of the long trail that leads, not to the persimmon tree, but to the pot—surely an ordeal that ought to dry up the springs of life and strike the victim dead from terror if anything could. Yet I never heard of a 'possum that thus gave up the ghost; and many of them, within a quarter of an hour after they are placed in the fattening coop on the return of the hunters, have already so far recovered their equanimity as to eat with great relish sweet potatoes or table-scrap or any other edible thing that is placed in the coop with them.

Hence, to conclude that this 'possum of my garden perished as the result of a sudden access of fear seems contrary to all the inferences to be drawn from 'possum history, to all the implications of 'possum lore, and to the very constitution of the

animal itself. Yet, if fear did not kill him, I do not know what did; for it is hardly conceivable that he feigned death so earnestly as actually to induce death; and no other explanation fits the case. There is nothing for it, I think, except to say that here was Nature in capricious mood again, snapping her fingers at rule and law, making sport of age-long custom and the learning that men put into books. It was a whim of the whimsical goddess to have it happen so, and so it did happen, though all experience and all logic forbade it.

Who will complain of these quips and pranks? Certain crabbed professors, no doubt, who spend their lives within four walls, reducing everything to formulæ, and who are vastly annoyed to see their laborious theories upset. But surely not those for whom sunsets glow and nonpareils flash their colors in the light and the water hyacinth paints a single golden spot upon a single petal of her lilac bloom to make loveliness yet more lovely.

SNAKE WITCHERY

ONE April day, not long ago, I was walking through the woods studying deer tracks. Suddenly I saw, gliding slowly towards me through the short grass, a rather thick-bodied black and red serpent about four feet long. I stopped instantly and stood perfectly still. The snake came on steadily, its glittering body seeming to flow over the ground like a running brook. It passed within two feet of me, evidently unaware of my presence, and would have gone on about its private business had I not stepped in front of it and thus brought it to a halt.

Now if the average intelligent citizen had seen me confront this serpent and stand directly in its path, he would have set me down as a fool. If he had then seen me stoop and, after a bit of manoeuvring, grasp the snake by the back of its neck and lift it from the ground, he would have considered me a lunatic. If this average citizen were a city man, knowing nothing about snakes, he would probably have contented himself with the theory that something was the matter with my brain. But if he were a country-dweller, knowing something—

but not much—about snakes and about this black and red snake in particular, he would have been convinced not only that I was a fool or a lunatic but also that I was in imminent danger of becoming a corpse. For as likely as not he would have informed me, with ashy face and with convulsive gasps for breath, that I was holding in my hand the deadliest of all the reptilian inhabitants of the woods, the fearsome and ferocious horn snake one drop of whose venom can not only kill a man but can make a green tree wither and die within an hour.

Even to such lengths as this have the members of the serpent tribe gone—quite unintentionally and involuntarily—in fooling mankind and making sensible men and women talk and act like ninnies. That handsome black and red serpent which I held in my hand, and which after a few minutes seemed quite content to remain there, was entirely innocuous. There was no way in the world in which it could do me the slightest harm, and, gentle, peaceful creature that it was, it had no desire to do me any harm. It was a specimen of the red-bellied snake, known to the naturalists as *Farancia* and really entitled to the gratitude of the human race because it preys on various forms of life inimical to humans. A dove or a chipping sparrow is quite as dangerous as *Farancia*. Yet many a six foot man has felt cold shivers run up and down his spine

at sight of this serpent, and there are thousands of people who firmly believe that it is more formidable than the diamond rattler himself, the king of the serpent race, and who would not stroke its sleek, iridescent back for all the gold of the Indies.

Of course, Farancia is only one of the many, many snakes which have the public badly fooled. I have used him as an example because I happened to run across him the other day in the woods and because his case is a particularly striking instance of the snake insanity from which the public suffers. The myth of the horned serpent or horn snake—a snake with a deadly envenomed horn, not on its head, but on its tail—is an old one. It has come down from the earliest days of America and it has not lost strength with age. Large numbers of people believe in it firmly, and it is not difficult to find persons who have relatives who were actually chased by horn snakes which, taking their tails in their mouths, rolled along like hoops over the ground. This happened, for instance, to the grandmother of a friend of mine; and many a time her little grandson—he was little then—had heard the story: how when the family were driving to church one Sunday morning in the double buggy, they saw an immense horn snake come rolling hoop-wise after them down the hill, and how it would surely have overtaken them had it not happened to strike a tree by

the side of the road; and then, as a thrilling climax, how, upon their return from church, they found that the horn snake had driven its lethal horn into the tree, every leaf of which had turned brown!

Farancia's "horn" is a tiny needle-like spine so small that you have to search for it in order to see it. It takes the liveliest sort of an imagination to transform it into a deadly weapon, but when it comes to snakes there is no limit to what the human imagination can accomplish. Nor is Farancia the only serpent which masquerades as the horn snake. His close cousin Abastor, the rainbow snake, is also identified with that dreaded monster, and so is the pine snake or bull snake, a serpent of magnificent proportions and formidable appearance—he is sometimes eight feet in length—but perfectly harmless.

Even more frequently *Ophisaurus*, the little "glass snake," which is not a snake at all but a lizard without legs, throws a scare into the countryside. When the glass snake is pursued and seized by some enemy—say, a black snake—he seems to break in half. The rear half is left wriggling in the black snake's jaws, while the front half makes its escape in the bushes. The rear half is really nothing but *Ophisaurus*'s tail. He can get along perfectly well without it, and so, when the black snake seizes it, *Ophisaurus* simply disconnects it, leaves it with the black snake, and proceeds to grow another.

This substitute tail, however, is always much shorter than the original, thinner, of a different color, and tapering rather sharply to a point. It might conceivably, by a superhuman effort of the imagination, be compared with a horn: and in the plantation country the belief prevails widely that glass snakes which have grown these substitute tails are really specimens of the deadly horn snake and are more to be dreaded than an army with banners.

More that is not so is known positively about snakes than about any other group of animals. Take the spreading adder or puff adder, for instance. Of course, everybody knows positively that the spreading adder is deadly. As a matter of fact, it is not deadly or even in the slightest degree harmful; it is not an adder but a hog-nosed snake; and the chances are you could not make it bite you if you tried. It is just a big bluff, one of the biggest bluffs in the whole reptilian world. Mankind ought to be heartily ashamed of its silliness, amounting to insanity, about snakes. There is something supremely ridiculous in the spectacle of the Lord of Creation, who prides himself so greatly upon his intelligence and his reasoning powers, hating and fearing all snakes when only a very few of them are dangerous or harmful and many of them are among his best friends because they help to keep down various pests.

But perhaps, after all, we ought not to blame the generality of mankind for knowing a great many things that are not so about the serpent race. Even the scientists know some things about them that are not true. If you tell the scientists that rattlesnakes occasionally climb trees, they will entertain a poor opinion of you. They know quite positively that the rattler is not a tree-climbing snake and they know quite positively that the rattler could not possibly climb a tree. Yet, the rattlesnake does occasionally get up into a tree—very, very rarely and just how I don't know; but within the past year or so a four foot rattlesnake was killed some twenty feet up in a live-oak not very far from where I live.

There is no better or more eminent authority on American snakes than the author of a book on reptiles which is now on my desk and which is the best book of its kind ever written on the subject. Yet, when this high authority says in substance that the rattlesnake's rattle seldom attains a length of more than ten or eleven rings and that rattles consisting of more than seventeen segments are frauds produced by snapping two or more sets of rattles into one another, he gives some of the big diamond-backs of the swamp country cause for righteous indignation.

As a matter of fact, rattles with more than twenty segments are not excessively rare in this

region. I have before me at this moment a rattle containing twenty-two segments which came from a big rattler who met his death on Oakhurst Plantation and which is certainly not a fraud. Only the other day a negro woodsman of my acquaintance, whom I believe because I have often been in the woods with him and because I have found that he speaks the truth, told me of a big rattler which had been killed near his cabin and which had a rattle of twenty-three rings. I have come across a number of other instances of the same sort, and the truth is that hereabouts rattles of more than ten or eleven rings are fairly common, probably because this is not a rocky country and therefore the rattles are not so easily broken in the course of the snake's wanderings through the woods.

Thus even the best of the scientists do not know all that there is to know about snakes. Occasionally unlettered woodsmen can set them right about certain points, though much of what the woodsmen know about snakes is not so, and of the two the scientists are by far the better snake experts. I am inclined to suspect, after long study of the question in a country where wild life abounds, that some of the scientists, while they are fundamentally right about the matter, are a trifle too sweeping in their contemptuous rejection of all woodsmen's stories about the supposed power of certain snakes, par-

ticularly the rattlers, to "charm" or fascinate the creatures on which they prey.

The snake probably does not "charm" in precisely the way that the woodsmen suppose; but the woodsman who insists that he has seen the thing with his own eyes is not necessarily a romancer on that account. The whole process may be explained by substituting curiosity for mesmerism as the compelling power which brings the squirrel or bird down from its safe tree-top to that perilous circle about the snake to venture within which is to tempt death. Squirrels and many birds have a highly developed sense of what in human beings is known as curiosity or inquisitiveness; and undoubtedly the sight of a snake lying in some open spot in the woods, perhaps at the foot of a tree, often stimulates to an unusual extent this sense of curiosity and brings the little furred or feathered creature, by fits and starts, nearer and nearer to the fateful circle and sometimes actually within it.

To explain the process in this way is to rob it of much of its mystery and strangeness; but it should be borne in mind that, while it is the curiosity of the squirrel and not some mysterious hypnotic faculty of the serpent which brings the squirrel down to his death, it is probable that in many instances the whole affair is deliberately contrived and managed by the snake—that the snake's behavior on such an

occasion, though doubtless wholly instinctive, is just as truly deliberate and purposeful as the stalking of a rabbit by the lynx or the downward swoop of the hawk upon a meadow mouse crouching in the grass.

The snake plays upon the curiosity of the squirrel, utilizes it to accomplish his purpose, adopts a method of procedure calculated, with what seems like Satanic subtlety, to achieve his end. In a true sense he does fascinate or "charm" his victim, not in the way generally accepted by the credulous, through the exercise of an uncanny wizardry peculiar to the serpent race, but by taking advantage of a familiar weakness in his victim's mental make-up which causes the latter to yield to an inquisitiveness as foolish and as potent as the feeling of horror and repulsion which seizes upon most human beings in the presence of a snake of any kind.

A hunter once gave me an account of a remarkable experience which may be worth relating here in his own words. "About three years ago," he said, "I was walking through the woods with another man when he told me to hush and stand still. I asked him what he wanted, and he asked me if I saw that snake charming a squirrel, and I said 'Yes.' He said that he was going to shoot the snake and that the squirrel would fall out of the tree dead, and I said I didn't believe it. So he shot the snake, and the squirrel fell out of the tree dead. I don't

know whether any will believe this, but it is the truth. I saw it."

It is a safe assumption that very few will believe it at first blush. Yet one of the best and most experienced woodsmen of my acquaintance, perhaps the greatest deer-hunter in all this region, when he was asked what he thought of the tale, replied that in his opinion it might very well be true.

It was possible, he said, that the two hunters had arrived upon the scene towards the finale of a drama which had begun many minutes, possibly an hour, earlier. Perhaps long before they appeared, the snake, lying near the foot of a tree, attracted the attention of the squirrel, which thereupon was impelled by its overwhelming sense of curiosity to investigate the intruder, approaching gradually closer and closer to it as it lay silent and motionless, until at last the little beast ventured within the serpent's reach.

Then, perhaps, came the lightning-like thrust of the arrow-shaped head, and the startled squirrel, with the deadly venom in his veins but not enough of it to kill him instantly, scampered back up his tree. If it was at this moment that the two hunters arrived, the contortions of the dying squirrel in the tree as the poison worked upon him might well have given him the appearance of an animal thrown into a sort of convulsive fit by the hypnotic influence of

the reptile's "basilisk eye"; and it is possible that death, through action of the poison, came to the squirrel at the very moment, or within a few moments, of the discharge of the hunter's gun leveled at the snake. This hypothesis, it is true, involves a somewhat remarkable coincidence, but it is one which may have occurred, and I think it is a more probable explanation of the story than the theory that the narrator either lied or else deceived himself in some extraordinary way.

As a rule, in this region at any rate, woodsmen—by which I mean real woodsmen, regardless of whether they live in the woods, as many of them do, or in towns—are truthful men. They may deceive themselves and draw false conclusions from what they see in the woods, and they are more likely to deceive themselves about snakes than about any other animals because of the strange paralyzing effect which the serpent kind seem to have upon the reasoning power of mankind in general. But only a few of them are downright fakers. If they are real woodsmen, it is always worth while to listen to what they have to say, and it is seldom wise to sweep their stories, even their snake stories, contemptuously aside without consideration. Persons who do this—and some snake savants are too much inclined to do it—are likely to miss some good things and some true things which are worth learning.

What of the rattlesnake's rattle, that strange instrument, unique in the animal kingdom, which to the first explorers was one of the greatest wonders of the great New World? What is its function? Of what use is it to the serpent? These questions have led to endless speculation and many theories have been evolved. Of these the simplest is undoubtedly the best.

Under the conditions now existing, the rattlesnake's rattle, while it may be of some value to the snake as a sexual call, is, on the other hand, a great handicap to the species because it betrays the presence of the rattlesnake to enemies who proceed at once to kill it. It may be true, as Ernest Ingersoll says, that "this menacing message, clicked from the vibrating tail, has caused many a man to turn back and thus give the snake a chance to escape"; but in a vastly greater number of instances the ringing of the rattles on the approach of a man has led directly to the serpent's death. The obvious fact that the rattle is thus a handicap instead of a help to the animal, betraying its presence to its most dangerous foe, has been a stumbling block in the effort to arrive at a correct understanding of the organ's function and of the way in which it came to be developed. This difficulty disappears when we remember that the rattlesnake's contact with man is something very new and recent, that man—espe-

cially civilized man—is a new and late arrival in the rattlesnake's habitat, and that the coming of civilized man changed completely the conditions of life for the rattlesnake kind.

What were the conditions of life for the rattlesnake four or five or ten centuries ago? What were the most formidable enemies confronting the rattlesnake then? Surely they were the vast herds and packs of large animals which ranged over all this country, the incalculable droves of deer, elk, and buffalo, the innumerable wolves and bears. We can scarcely picture to ourselves to-day the wild animal life of the primitive woods or realize that, in Carolina for instance, even after the white man had begun to establish himself in the country, three thousand buffalo might be seen in one natural pasture, while "large herds of deer were scarcely ever out of sight of the pioneer even while standing in his cabin door." Wolves in great packs were everywhere, pumas abounded, bears were so numerous that "a hunter of ordinary skill could kill in one season enough to make three thousand pounds of bacon." It may sound a little odd, because we cannot readily accustom our minds to the idea of so vast a concourse of wild animals of the larger kinds, but it is probably sober truth that the chief danger to which the rattlesnakes of those times were exposed was the danger of being stepped on by wild

beasts and that this danger was serious, imminent, and ever-present.

As it was then, so had it been for hundreds or, rather, thousands of years before then. We do not know how far back into geological time the race history of the rattlesnake extends, but there were snakes in the Cretaceous era and perhaps before the Cretaceous, and from that far distant day until only yesterday North America swarmed with large animals, not only those species which still exist, but many others also which, like the American horses, camels, tapirs, elephants, and giant sloths, have only recently become extinct, as the geologist reckons time. These wild animals of many different kinds, all of them that were heavy enough to injure a snake on which they trod, must have been a grave menace to the ancient snakes, and against them the snake had to be constantly on guard to save himself from being trampled underfoot. Certainly it is easy to see how valuable a protection against this danger the rattlesnake's rattle must have been, a protection all the more valuable because the rattlesnake cannot hiss. Once he had made his presence known he was safe, for all wild animals knew him and were aware of his deadly power. They were not the sort of enemy that man is, an enemy who becomes all the more formidable when he is warned by the ringing of the rattles, because no sooner does

he hear the warning than he sets about killing the snake. They, when they heard the rattles ringing in the grass in front of them, turned away and left the snake in peace.

The rattlesnake's rattle, then, is a survival from those days, an instrument of warning which, up to the very recent past, was exceedingly useful to the slow-moving, bulky serpent, living on the ground in the midst of millions of great heavy beasts, many of them equipped with sharp, hard hoofs. Lacking the speed of the coachwhip, not an agile and skillful climber of bushes, reeds, and trees, like the black-snake, frequenting the open woods and meadows where the big beasts grazed in their myriads and the grass and the wild pea-vine grew as high as a buffalo's back, the rattler rang his "morris bells" whenever the vibrating ground apprised him of the approach of some large animal; and, for the same reason and in obedience to the same instinct, he rings them to-day when the ground shakes under him.

But fate has played him a trick. After serving him well for long centuries, his rattle has turned against him, though he does not realize it, and is now the means of his undoing. When the ground trembles under him now, it is not a buffalo or an elk or a wild horse that is coming. It may be a deer, but in many cases it is a man—and not a man like those he used to know, copper-colored men who

generally turned aside at his warning and left him unharmed, because among the Indians the rattlesnake was an object of veneration. To-day it is a white man (or else a black one) a hater of snakes and of rattlesnakes most of all. Hearing that whirling challenge, he does not change his course and go his way but advances cautiously, scanning the ground in front of him and all around him; and, seeing the great, kingly, mailed serpent defiant in his beautiful, hideous coil, he levels his weapon and blows the gorgeous, terrible reptile into bloody fragments.

GREAT SOARING BIRDS

PULLING weeds is a wearisome occupation. Unless you are very young and limber you will find it necessary to straighten your back at frequent intervals. I was pulling weeds in my garden one afternoon when my back muscles cried out insistently for a truce, and, in straightening up, I happened to glance into the air. There, by what was thus the purest of accidents, I saw a glorious thing.

For several hours a squall had been brewing, one of those September squalls which here are taken as a matter of course. The sky was piled high with cloud-mountains, some gray, some inky-black, others as white as though capped with snow,—Himalayas of dense vapor, topped by “thunder-heads” in which yellow lightning flashed and gleamed. These cloud-masses covered nearly the whole face of the heavens; but almost directly overhead a strip of clear blue stretched north and south,—a long, straight corridor, like an open pass between huge crags. Down this corridor, flying southward toward the sea, came two bald eagles.

They were a fine sight, those two big birds,

rushing with swift, powerful strokes of their pinions, then for a space sailing on stiff, widely extended wings, along that blue road, while the thunder growled in the black cliffs along their way, and the tall peaks overhanging their path glowed now and then with sudden fire. I watched them until they had passed on out of view down their corridor through the storm, hastening, no doubt, towards their refuge on one of the islands at the sea's edge. Then, when the first volley of rain had put an end to my weed-pulling, I went indoors, opened a book that I had been reading, and, by a queer coincidence, came presently to the following passage:

"It was early morning in early spring: at all events, the geese had not gone yet, but were continually flying by overhead, flock succeeding flock, filling the world with their clangor. I watched the sky rather than the earth, feasting my eyes on the long-unseen spectacle of great soaring birds. Buzzard and kite and marsh-harrier soared in wide circles above me, raining down their wild shrill cries. Other and greater birds were there as well, and greatest of all, the pelican, one of the large birds on which the marshmen lived, but doomed to vanish and be forgotten as a British species long ages before Drayton lived. But his familiar osprey was here too, a king among the hawks, sweeping

round in wide circles, to pause by and by in mid career and, closing his wings, fall like a stone upon the water with a mighty splash. We floated in a world of birds; herons everywhere standing motionless in the water, and flocks of spoonbills busily at feed, and in the shallower places and by the margins, innumerable shorebirds,—curlews, godwits, and loquacious black and white avocets. Shel-drakes, too, in flocks rose up before us, with deep, honking, goose-like cries, their white wings glistening like silver in the early morning sunlight. Other sounds came from a great way off, faintly heard, a shrill confused buzzing clangor as of a swarm of bees passing overhead, and, looking that way, we saw a cloud rising out of the reeds and water, then another and another still,—clouds of birds, each its own color, white, black, and brown, according to the species,—gulls, black terns, and wild duck. . . .

“Presently the clouds disappeared or settled on the water again, and for a little space it seemed a silent world. Then a new sound was heard from some distant spot perhaps a mile away,—a great chorus of wild, ringing, jubilant cries, echoing and re-echoing all over that illimitable watery expanse; and I knew it was the crane,—the giant crane that hath a trumpet sound!”

I closed the book, my mind full of a sudden emotion, not sorrow exactly, nor compassion, but some-

thing akin to both of them. That vivid and stirring picture was only a vision, a dream, born of the deep longing of a man to see a thing which he could never see again,—the spectacle of vast congregations of wild-fowl in their native marshes, and, most of all, the spectacle of great and strange birds soaring and sweeping through the air in some wild, undesecrated place. There must be many readers who recall the passage. It is W. H. Hudson who is speaking, dreaming that he is back in "the old undrained Lincolnshire" of Michael Drayton's time, and then, by a still bolder flight of fancy, transporting himself to a Somerset lake of twenty-five centuries ago and floating with an ancient lake-dweller in his long canoe "by devious ways over the still waters, by miles and leagues of grey rushes and sedges vivid green, and cat's-tail and flowering rush and vast dark bulrush beds and islets covered with thickets of willow and alder and trees of larger growth." What would not this English lover of "great soaring birds" have given to see those eagles go sailing down their high corridor between the cloud-mountains? He would have traveled, I said to myself, from one end of England to the other to see that sight. And I had seen it from my city garden!

I had never thought of it in just that way before, but I realized then, with those eagles and Hudson's

passage in my mind, that a man should thank his lucky star if he lives in a country where great soaring birds abound. There are many great soaring birds here in this Low Country, and they add immeasurably to its interest and charm. The most abundant of them are the vultures,—black vultures and turkey buzzards, the most graceful soarers of all. These are so common that scarcely anybody glances at them a second time, and one does not realize how they would be missed out of the sky unless one comes upon some such wistful reference as that of Hudson; but even here, where soaring birds are an everyday sight, the spectacle of a flock of circling wood ibises, excellent substitutes for Hudson's "giant crane that hath a trumpet sound," is sure to arrest attention. Many of the hawks soar beautifully, the best of them being the kites, the "hen hawks" or Buteos, and the osprey. A notable soarer, too, is the snakebird or anhinga, a fantastic, reptile-like denizen of deep swamps: but, while he is less picturesque in the air than either the wood ibis or the anhinga, the greatest and noblest of all the soaring birds is the bald eagle; and in thinking about the soarers of the Low Country, the mind goes back to him and insists upon dwelling on him, though of course he is far less abundant than the vultures and hawks and is nothing like so familiar a sight in the sky.

To anyone deeply sensible of the superb dignity which is so important an element in the regal beauty of the King of Birds, the soaring eagle is the finest sight which the high air affords,—even finer, though less dramatic and spirited, than the eagle in the full exercise of his marvelous swiftness, strength, and skill, asserting his sovereignty over the osprey and exacting tribute from him. Yet, even to-day, when in most parts of America the eagle has become so rare as to be almost unknown, there are men,—thousands of them, sad to say,—who will miss no opportunity to kill him. Not long ago an eagle, soaring above a Low Country river, saw beneath him a flock of wild ducks floating on the water. Down he came like a stone, and striking his claws into one of the ducks, he lifted it from the river. He must have been at that moment a vastly astonished eagle, for instead of a soft yielding body encased in feathers it was a hard, impenetrable object that he clutched,—a wooden decoy, fashioned and painted like a duck, anchored on the water by hunters to attract the game within reach of their guns. For once the eagle's matchless eye had played him false, and he paid a heavy penalty for his blunder, for one of the hunters hidden in a blind shot him when he had risen a dozen or so feet above the surface.

I heard the other day of another eagle which had

better luck. I had related in a magazine article a story told to me years ago by a negro fisherman, a story of an eagle which plunged into the water to recover a fish surrendered by an osprey at his overlord's behest. The fisherman watched the big bird swoop down and saw him strike the surface of the inlet in a shower of spray from which he never emerged. It was as though the inlet had opened and swallowed him, and the negro believed that the eagle had driven his claws into the back of a shark and, unable to free himself, had been carried down. A reader was reminded by this of a somewhat similar incident, but one which ended more happily.

One day her father noticed a queer-looking object in the river making for an island not far away. Calling a negro to row him, he got his gun and set out to investigate. When he was near enough to recognize it he found that the object was a bald eagle, apparently swimming. Desiring to determine the cause of so strange a performance, he followed, and the bird, perhaps assisted by wind or tide, soon reached shallow water. There the mystery was solved. The eagle's claws were fast in a large eel, evidently too large for even his strong wings to support, yet not quite large enough to drag him down to a watery death.

Anything that lifts up a man's eyes is good. The blue sky, with its moving, changing cloud-

shapes of snowy white, is the most beautiful thing in nature and the least regarded. Great soaring birds turn a man's eyes and his thoughts to the sky; and here in the Low Country it is a sky alive not only with shifting shapes of cloud, but also with big birds. You must choose your time and your place, of course. The best time is April: the best place some opening in lonely deep woods close to one of those bird-cities which one finds in many of the Low Country lagoons and backwaters.

I recall an April morning two springs ago at the edge of a small city of aningas and great blue herons,—a city built in tall, moss-bannered cypresses rising out of the clear, wine-brown water of a shallow lagoon. All the heron houses in that city were full of well-grown young, hungry and clamorous, already nearly as tall as their parents but still too timid to fly. Each of the aninga nests contained eggs over which one of the parent birds brooded, the males sharing this onerous duty with their wives. On a big pine log, near which we sat, an otter had recently enjoyed a feast; on the ground close by the log we found fresh wildcat signs; along the trail across which the log lay, a big buck had walked that morning; in the lagoon a young three-foot alligator basked at the surface of the water, studying us solemnly with glassy, gray-brown, unwinking eyes.

Our own eyes watched the sky above,—a wide square of bright blue framed by the feathery cypress-tops. Across this opening big birds were continually passing at various heights. Many parent herons were coming in from their fishing; and it was a fine thing to see them swerve and head up into the wind, then come down with collapsed wings, necks fully extended, slender legs dangling. Very lightly and buoyantly they dropped through the air to their nests. But more beautiful by far was the anhingas' way of descending, planing on motionless wings down a long spiral stairway from the upper air, their long necks stretched to the utmost, their fan-like tails outspread.

Watching these travelers return to their homes in the cypresses, we saw many others which sailed at much higher levels, most of them turkey buzzards and black vultures swinging round and round against the blue. But higher than any of these an aninga was soaring, so high that it was a mere speck, the outline of which was barely distinguishable even with strong field glasses; and almost as high as the aninga two bald eagles drew circles and ellipses, while near them a red-tailed hawk hung for a space of moments motionless. The sunlight was like silver on the white heads and tails of the soaring eagles; on the tail of the big hawk it shone like gold: again and again white flashes in the air

resolved themselves into far-off egrets, stately and immaculate, journeying along lofty air-roads towards their breeding place in another lagoon miles away.

"One of the most delightful, the most exhilarating spectacles of wild bird life," says Hudson in one of his earlier books, "is that of the soaring heron. The great blue bird, with great round wings so measured in their beats, yet so buoyant in the vast void air! It is indeed a sight which moves all men to admiration in all countries which the great bird inhabits." Not in all; for although the heron in ten different forms inhabits the Low Country in great numbers, we never see him soaring here, or mounting "with powerful wing-beats almost vertically to a vast height in the sky." He is often to be seen high in the air, and a great blue heron in flight is always a bird worth looking at; but, unlike his companion of the marshes, the wood ibis, he never soars or circles, so far as I know, but passes on in a straight course, his long neck looped in front of him, his legs trailing like a rudder.* Perhaps if the heron were hunted with hawks here, as he is still hunted in some Old World lands, he would have

* In "Music of Fairies" I spoke of the danger of asserting that a certain bird or other animal never does a certain thing. Here is an instance. Since this chapter was written, I have seen, in spring, great blue herons and little blue herons circling upward to a great height, preparatory, I think, to continuing their migratory journey.

acquired the habit of soaring; but falconry is not commonly practised in this country, and the hawks of the marshes and swamps leave the heron alone and seem never to molest him, so that he has not been compelled to exercise the power of soaring which is probably latent in him.

A soaring great blue heron, or, better yet, a soaring white heron, would be a beautiful sight, I can readily imagine, though hardly more beautiful or stirring than a soaring wood ibis. But if war between the hawks and the herons is necessary in order to teach the latter to soar, I had rather leave matters as they stand; for in a region where there are so many hawks, and not only hawks but eagles also, such a war would be a disastrous one for the heron kind, and soon there might be no herons left. Then I could never again look out of my window here in the city and see a yellow-crowned night heron in one of my sugarberry trees, or watch him fishing in a rain puddle in the garden as calmly as though he stood on the edge of some dark lagoon in the heart of Santee Swamp; and, worst of all, I could never again sit on my doorstep on an October evening and listen to the heron armies streaming overhead through the darkness,—hundreds and hundreds of herons, or perhaps thousands and thousands of them, on nights when their strange voices, deep or shrill, float down from every quarter of the sky, and the

whole air above the garden seems full of rushing, unseen forms.

Directly overhead passes one of the great migration routes, one of the most traveled air-roads in the world. Untold myriads of birds follow the Atlantic shore line in the fall, coming down the coast of the Carolinas and Georgia and crossing the head of the Florida peninsula, where they "jump off" for the long flight across the Gulf. Most of them travel by night. I cannot see them but I can hear them,—regiment after regiment of birds of many kinds, sweeping southward along the edge of the continent, perhaps guided by the moan of the surf along the beaches of the coast,—bound for their Promised Land. Of all these travelers the herons are the most garrulous, and of all these voices the most memorable is the voice of the heron, sometimes harsh, sometimes sharp and metallic, sometimes guttural, always imparting a sense of wildness and strangeness. There have been nights when I have thought that the whole heron population of America must be passing over my garden; nights when one could really feel the sweep and surge of invisible on-rushing legions thronging the broad air-road above the city.

Among these nocturnal voyagers the most abundant,—aside from the ricebirds, warblers, and other small migrants,—seem to be black-crowned night

herons and green herons. Only rarely may one catch a glimpse of them on their journey, for as a rule they do not begin passing over until darkness has fallen; and to see them one must go to the open marshes where the light lasts longer because there are no trees or houses to shut it out. There sometimes I have seen for an instant big, dark forms, barely distinguishable in the gloom, winging their way a hundred or two hundred feet overhead,—twenty or thirty or perhaps fifty of them, flying in loose formation, or in no formation at all, heading southwestward, following the line of the coast. Ghostlike, mysterious, grotesque, they fade into the night. But for the sound of their voices, one might doubt that they were real.

SEA ISLAND MAGIC

SPRING comes with especial exquisiteness to the long narrow barrier islands stretching up and down the Low Country coast between the marshes and the sea. She comes most exquisitely of all in the form of flocks of milk-white herons drifting up from the tropical countries like gleaming wisps of wind-blown snowy cloud. These flocks come in March and April; and when the white heron-clouds are seen floating airily up from the southward above the clean palm-fringed beaches, the fleets of blue-bill ducks, dotting the ocean waters all along the coast just outside the farthest line of breakers, know that it is time to move.

Squadron after squadron, they rise on the water and take to wing. Sometimes they travel many miles before they alight again, keeping always just outside the surf; sometimes they fly only a few hundred yards, spending the rest of the day floating on the warm water like little ships at anchor; and, as each squadron moves on, its place is taken by another coming from farther south. So, through early April, the procession continues, a seemingly endless multitude of ducks, in regiments and battal-

ions, journeying northward by easy stages along the barrier island beaches, with many halts and much idling, playing, and gossiping by the way. And at frequent intervals these bluebill fleets, riding the waves outside the breakers, look up and see drifting over them under the vivid blue sky another little white cloud of herons, bringing the summer up from the hot regions where summer never ends.

Now this is no springtime idyl: but this coming of spring to the Low Country sea islands—riding up from the tropics on the shining, sunlit, rhythmic wings of the white heron flocks—is a miraculously beautiful thing, and one must write of it reverently. It is typical of the sea-islands' magic; but many other things, great and small, tangible and intangible, contribute to the making of that magic. In the evening, as we sit listening to the roar of the surf on the barrier beach a half-mile away across the marshes and to the music of the wind in the palmettos and pines encircling our little camp, six long-legged, loop-necked birds, looming black and monstrous in the moonlight, sail slowly over our heads in single file, barely topping the summits of the pines—great blue herons, like cranes in a Japanese print, coming in to the woods to roost. In the dead of the night chuck-wills-widows, big brown cousins of the whippoorwill, sing eerily in the blackness, and at crack of dawn the red-berried evergreen

cassena thickets ring with the loud joyful songs of cardinals and Carolina wrens. Then, when day has come, we hear the songs of the willets—shrill yet sweet and flute-like songs, coming from near and far, borne to us on the breeze that sweeps in from the sea across the wilderness of marsh.

Through this marsh winds a tidal creek which will bring us, after many meanderings, from our camp amid the palmettos to the back beach of the long low barrier isle fronting the sea. It is a creek of many memories. Perhaps the pirates knew this little river in the old buccaneer days, for a tortuous channel joins it to a deep wide inlet which was once a favorite pirate haunt. Undoubtedly, in the palmy time of the great sea-island planters, these quiet waters often saw the long boats and swift barges, rowed by stalwart singing negroes, in which the planters navigated the numberless creeks and rivers that wind in and out through the sea-island region and make it a sort of rural Venice.

All along this creek of ours are places to which we have given names of our own making. There is Porpoise Point, for instance, where, one autumn day, a herd of charging dolphins, racing round the point in pursuit of a school of mullet, nearly ran over us as we lay at anchor in a little bateau, fishing for whiting, croaker, and other small fry. To the left is Ibis Sound, an open space in the marsh cov-

ered with water at high tide, where in late summer we sometimes see long-shanked, fantastic, black-and-white wood ibises. To the right are the Haunted Sands where, it is said, the planters settled their affairs of honor in the old dueling days—sands where, if the legend be true, gentlemen of the old plantations, dead and buried these many years, still walk at night.

I am not so sure about the ghosts of the old planters. If they come they leave no tracks visible to mortal eyes. But there are other wanderers of the night whose visits are a matter of record, for in the morning the record may be read in the sands, and always it is an interesting tale.

In the wide open spaces about the inlets, in the sandy mud of the back beaches along the edges of the marsh, in the loose white soil of the front beaches above high-water mark, on the smooth slopes of the little valleys winding amid the lonely dunes, the wild creatures of the barrier island jungles write fascinating stories.

Comparatively few wild four-foots inhabit the cultivated well-settled islands between the barrier islands and the mainland; but the dense semi-tropical woods clothing the interiors of most of the barrier isles are natural sanctuaries, and at night the wild things which live in them roam widely and inscribe in the sands the story of their wanderings.

These writings, too, are part of the sea-islands' magic, telling true tales of raccoons and minks, of bay lynxes or wildcats, of swamp rabbits and cottontails, of slim does and lusty bucks of the island race of deer, differing in certain respects from the deer of the mainland from which they are cut off by the wide areas of marsh that lie between.

These trails of the four-footed island dwellers are everywhere, but one seldom catches a glimpse of the creatures that make them. This is part of their charm—this mystery which invests them. It is otherwise with the sea-island birds—herons of seven species and rails and ibises, eagles and vultures and hawks, gulls and terns and skimmers, willets and curlews and oyster-catchers, loons and cormorants and ducks, pelicans and gannets, plovers and sandpipers of many kinds, and various smaller feathered folk. Of them all—excepting only the bald eagle—I set most store by the wood ibises. They are birds upon which the mind loves to dwell and they stand out tall and grotesque and fascinating among the recollections of boyhood.

Late in the afternoon of a hot summer day I looked out across a broad tidal river near its mouth and saw above the woods on the opposite bank a straight black line drawn against the sky. A second glance showed that it was a line of birds, a feathered army strung out in a long column, stretching

perhaps two miles from end to end. The river with its marshes was nearly a mile wide, but the black line was sharply etched against the glowing background of a brilliant sunset, and I could see that the birds were of great size. At that distance their wings appeared motionless, so that all that host of many thousands seemed to be suspended rigid and immovable in the air. I thought of whistling swans and of sandhill cranes, splendid birds which I had never seen and for which I was always on the watch. But it mattered little at the moment what these big birds of the sunset were: the wildness and strangeness of the scene, its magical poetry, were sufficient in themselves and filled the mind to the exclusion of every other thought. When afterward I concluded that the birds were almost certainly wood ibises, a species scarcely known to me then, the ibis became at once a creature of irresistible allurements.

So it has been ever since. Better acquaintance with the ibis has not broken the spell. I had rather see it than any other bird of the sea-island marshes. Not even the herons and egrets recall so vividly the lonely beauty of those wide salt-prairies, green in summer, golden-brown or olive-brown in winter, behind the barrier beaches. Nor was the charm diminished when I found that on certain marshes the wood ibis was not rare but common and that

it might be seen there in flocks of hundreds, especially at low tide when the shallow sounds went partly dry, leaving large areas of soft black mud uncovered.

Only occasionally was I able to visit these places to which the ibises resorted in large numbers. They were always rather rare in the marshes which I knew fairly well and were generally seen in groups of three or four, or sometimes in squadrons of twenty or twenty-five; nor was I able to find their secret breeding places in the swamps of the mainland and study the great birds at home, brooding over their eggs in big nests in the cypresses or feeding their gawky young with fish or frogs brought in their long stout bills from the marsh creeks or the swamp lagoons. Thus familiarity never bred contempt: the mystery and fascination of these tall denizens of the open marshes and the island woods remained and have never worn away; and though I have seen many ibises since the passage of that first ibis army across the sky, the bird still possesses for me the attraction of the strange and little known, a creature observed at fairly frequent intervals but still hiding its secrets.

One thing which enhanced this sense of mystery was the fact that I never saw the ibis feeding. So far as my observation went, the bird lived on air. Doubtless this was due mainly to the fact that the

ibises fed at low tide in the small marsh creeks and gullies where the tall grass hid them from view. There I could neither see nor hear them; but their senses were keener than mine.

Long before I came within gunshot, they rose with slow, powerful beats of their wide wings; and it was always a fine sight to see a squadron of a score or more of the big birds fly off across the marshes, alternately flapping their wings and sailing—and a still finer sight to see them climb, as they sometimes did, in wide spirals high into the air and then, at a great height, swing round and round in circles, soaring beautifully with only an occasional movement of their pinions. At such a time one forgot altogether the grotesqueness and awkwardness of the heavy, ungainly, rather sluggish-looking ibis of the mud-flats and saw instead a stately and buoyant creature of the heavens, a soarer second only to the soaring eagle himself and even more striking in the high air than the King of Birds because somehow the long neck and legs of the ibis gave the picture just the touch that was needed, while the sharply contrasting black and white plumage stood out with pleasing distinctness against the blue of the sky.

Since those days—heaven be praised—the ibis flocks of summer and early fall have dwindled very little if, indeed, they have dwindled at all. One

day last June I traveled for fifty miles along the narrow serpentine creeks and rivers that wind through the vast green plains of marsh, four miles or more in width, lying between the wooded mainland (the swamp country of "Marion and his Men") and the barrier islands stretching southward along the ocean from Cape Romain. Up from the marsh, close to our boat, rose suddenly a large flock of ibises, hidden from us until that moment by the tall marsh grass and caught napping for once—a cloud of great long-necked birds, fifty-two of them in all, as big as geese and far more beautiful despite their grotesque naked heads and heavy bills, so close at hand that we could hear the swish of their white, black-tipped wings. Up and up they went, with slow, strong wing-beats, until they were well beyond gunshot range. Then, for a while, they drifted about in the air above us, some flying in one direction, some in another, passing and repassing, flapping their wings occasionally, but for the most part sailing like airplanes to and fro.

That was only the first flock of many, for these are probably the best ibis marshes along the whole Low Country coast. Thenceforward, for forty miles or so, there was scarcely a minute when there were no ibises in sight, either resting in closely bunched flocks on little mounds in the marshes or floating about on motionless wings at varying

heights, sometimes so high in the air that they seemed to be just under the white cumulus clouds moving slowly across the bright blue June sky. Probably there is no other region in America where one could see in a month as many wood ibises as we saw that day, for nearly everywhere else on this continent these great storks are rare birds now. And the ibis flocks were not all that we found.

We saw also on the marshes scores of American egrets, gaining in numbers now that the plume hunters have been compelled to quit their bloody trade; and we saw many hundreds of the indescribably graceful least terns or sea swallows, nearly extinct a few years ago, and found them breeding in strong colonies in sandy spaces about the sea-island inlets and on sand banks or keys in the inlet mouths. On one small key the eggs of the great royal tern were so abundant that in places we could scarcely walk without stepping on them; and by the shore of a certain inlet hundreds of black skimmers had scooped out their shallow nests in the sand and had begun to lay their creamy-white, brown-spotted eggs.

Everywhere on the marshes we saw the commoner herons—the great blue, the little blue, and the graceful Louisiana heron or “Lady of the Waters,” perhaps the most abundant and certainly one of the most beautiful of all; and in one place,

at the very edge of the sea, we found a large breeding colony of Louisianas with a few little blues among them, a colony over which a lighthouse keeper, who is a lover of birds, has kept careful watch for years. Here the young herons are reared in safety, looking out from their seaside nests amid the myrtles and cassenas at the white surf breaking within a few yards of them, watching the fork-tailed royal terns wheeling overhead, gazing across the water at regiments of brown pelicans ranged in long ranks on the sand banks at the inlet's mouth, perhaps listening on still nights in June and July to the sighing of the big sea turtles, coming up out of the breakers in the moonlight to lay their eggs in the sands at the edge of the heron town.

Of the birds of the sand bars and beaches the pelicans are the largest and in many ways the best. They are common summer residents of the sea islands, breeding in hundreds on certain low sandbanks and flying ponderously up and down the coast, often wandering many miles away from their breeding places in search of the best fishing grounds. They are neither beautiful nor graceful, but there is something attractive about them, nevertheless.

One day in June, after a summer storm, a friend of mine, Captain Clarence Magwood, who lives on one of the islands, rescued a young pelican from one of a number of nests which had been flooded

by the tide. Captain Magwood took good care of the youngster and fed him plenty of fish, and in time he grew into a fine big pelican, as dignified and pompous as the most impressive of the pelican patriarchs of the Bull's Bay colony. He became very tame and spent most of his time in the vicinity of Captain Magwood's house and wharf. When motor boats came to the inlet to fish, the tame pelican would often take wing and fly out over the water to greet the visitors, sometimes lighting on the boats and accepting eagerly any tidbits in the form of mullet or other fish that might be offered him.

As the autumn drew near, Captain Magwood began to wonder whether his tame pelican would follow the custom of the pelican tribe in general and migrate southward for the winter. The question was soon decided. In October, probably at about the same time that the wild pelicans left for the south, this pelican disappeared. The instinct of migration had asserted itself and he had departed for those warmer climes where the pelicans spend the cold season.

Then the question arose whether or not he would return in the spring, and whether, in case he did return, he would remember his old friends at Captain Magwood's house and again become their pet. Early the following May these questions, too, were answered. The pelican reappeared, at about the

same time that the wild pelicans came up from the south; but, although the bird was not as wild as the others, for a time it would not permit Captain Magwood to approach it, nor did it return at first to the house or to the landing. After some days, however, it seemed to get over its fear. It came boldly in and waited on the shell pile at the landing, which had been one of its favorite haunts, until Captain Magwood appeared, and it showed no more fear of him then than during the previous summer when it had seemed to regard him as its friend and protector.

But it soon became evident that there was a sad reason for this change of demeanor. The pelican was ill. Captain Magwood took his cast-net and caught some mullet for the bird, but it refused to eat. Shortly thereafter it died. An examination showed a small mark on its body which was probably the mark of a shot. The bird had come back at last to its human protector, perhaps hoping—if birds can hope—that he could put an end to the pain which was slowly sapping its life.

The pelicans, ibises, and herons are ingredients of the sea-islands' summer magic. A few herons may be seen in winter on the marshes or about little sheltered fresh-water ponds hidden in the dense island woods close to the sea, but in the main they are birds of the warm weather. Yet the islands

have their winter magic too. Early one December morning as mild as June, we were fishing in the surf on one of the barrier beaches. It was not the season "full of sweet days and roses," but, none the less, this was one of those miraculous mornings which Victor Hugo had in mind when he said, "There is always one day when the valleys laugh and sing more gloriously and when the hills are more joyful together before the Lord." Except the sand dunes and swales behind us, there were no hills or valleys within many miles of where we stood in the surf; but sea and sky, palm-fringed beach, white dunes and marshes clad in their winter robe of soft brown flecked with gold, laughed and sang after their fashion and were joyful together.

We had made an early start from the little fishing shack amid the palmettos. Before dawn our lines, baited with fingerling mullet, were in the water; and although as yet the surf bass had given no sign, it had delighted us both to stand in the white breakers on that beach where there was no visible trace of man or his works and watch the marvel of the sunrise, a marvel all the more strange and splendid on the sea islands because there the rising sun seems to climb up out of the ocean. I have seen him, from the island beaches, come up like a ship on fire below the horizon, when I could have sworn that I could distinguish leaping flames,

sparks, and even smoke; but that morning he came with a straight red shaft piercing the gloom above him like a long fiery sword, and when the light had grown strong enough, he showed us an ocean which seemed a plane of pale-green translucent glass, an ocean dotted with birds.

Every object on that perfectly smooth surface within a radius of several miles was clearly discernible. The big loons, extraordinarily abundant that day, stood out most sharply of all, but even the little Bonaparte gulls, resting in hundreds on the glassy water, could be distinguished without difficulty at a great distance. Many gulls and two or three of the loons were floating within a hundred yards of the beach, but the squadrons of scaup ducks cruised farther out from the shore. Presently two great white-headed eagles came out of the jungly woods on the island beyond the inlet and, spiraling upward, circled far above us, mounting higher and higher, until at last they grew weary of watching us and sailed on set rigid wings straight out to sea.

When they had vanished in the sky mists, a herd of dolphins engrossed our attention as we stood knee-deep in the water, holding our rods at rest. They were close in shore, closer than they usually come, and they were having the time of their lives. They were not fishing but playing, darting here and

there at high speed, throwing their tails above the surface, coming up from the depths with such a rush that more than once they rose completely clear of the water as they turned to plunge down again. Gradually they moved in nearer, exploring the beach slues which the high tide had flooded, until some of them actually passed over our lines; and once one big fellow, who looked fully ten feet long, turned sharply when he was directly in front of me and came straight toward me through the water.

For a fraction of a second I felt a trifle nervous about his intentions, but in a moment he turned parallel with the beach again, and I saw at once what his purpose was. He had entered one of the billows of the surf, and now he was racing down the length of it, his whole big body suspended and plainly visible in the wall of clear green water raised up above the surrounding sea. He had scarcely passed when there came a sharp pull at my line, and a few moments later a five-pound surf bass flapping on the sand was evidence that these fish, which are supposed by some fishermen to stand in deadly terror of dolphins, or porpoises as we know them hereabouts, can be found and caught in the midst of a porpoise pack.

Thereafter, for about an hour and a half, the strikes came in fairly swift succession until, by the time the tide had passed its crest, we had landed

twelve bass, brave fighters all, though none was of more than medium size. When a glance at the surface of the inlet to our left showed that the ebb tide was running fast, we laid our rods on the sand and walked back to the edge of the dunes for a bit of breakfast and a rest. There was need of both. We had a greater weight of fish than we could carry easily, and we faced rather ruefully the task of floating them in the surf to the other inlet where we had left the boat.

There is no occupation more conducive to daydreams than surf fishing in spring or early fall on the lonely beautiful sea-island beaches. When the bass are not biting there is nothing for the fisherman to do except stand quietly in the surf and wait for whatever members of the finny tribes come swimming along the green lanes under the breakers. Then, with the music of the surf in his ears, he often sinks into a pleasant mental doze and dreams his daydreams as the graceful terns circle and swerve in front of him, and perhaps now and then an osprey sweeps over, or a squadron of pelicans, flying in single file, pass down the shore beyond the breakers, so close to the surface of the ocean that often an intervening roller hides them from sight. At such times the mind, though almost torpid so far as concerns the affairs of the busy world which seems so infinitely remote from these quiet beaches,

is often singularly sensitive to the sights and sounds of the moment. These sights and sounds shape the angler's dreams.

Thus, without moving out of my tracks in the surf, I have made some long voyages with the pelicans—not to distant countries but into past centuries. These deliberate feathered patriarchs, with their great heavy bills lying along their chests like long pointed beards, are the most pompous and dignified of all birds. Over and over again they have reminded me of bearded Spanish grandees, so that sometimes while watching them I have indulged in the fancy that here were the Spaniards come back once more to the islands.

It is long, as we reckon time, since these beaches last saw them. More than two centuries and a quarter ago they swooped down in two galleys upon the coast—a hundred Dons with an auxiliary force of Indians and blacks—sacked the Edisto plantations, then turned southward to Port Royal and utterly destroyed the Scotch settlement there. Yet this is only one of the bloody chapters in sea-island history. There are many others, from the earliest days of the white man in America, down through the Indian wars and the Revolution, to the end of the War between the States; and, if we can trust tradition, one of the bloodiest of them all was the chapter written at Bloody Point, as it was after-

ward known, when the white man took a leaf from the Indian's book and proved that when the spirit moved him he could kill as relentlessly as any Redskin.

The seaside settlements had been harried beyond endurance. The next time a war party came, burning and pillaging and finally carrying their plunder in heavily laden canoes across Broad River and farther south through the marsh waterways, the settlers banded together and followed. At Hilton Head, according to the story, friendly Indians told them that the raiders had gone on towards Dawfuskie, and there in due time the whites saw the smoke of the savages' camp fires. The Redskins, believing themselves safe from pursuit, had taken their canoes a little way up the river, to avoid the surf breaking upon the point at the end of the island, and the white men, advancing cautiously, soon had their enemies in a trap. "The surprise was complete," says an old chronicler, "the massacre dreadful—the white sand was crimsoned with blood—some escaped by swimming, but nearly the whole of the party was destroyed. It was literally a bloody point to them."

More than a little history has been written in the sands of the sea islands; much of it literally written in the sands, for many stories which are now no more than tragic or romantic legends must

have had facts for their foundation, though no one knows what the facts were. A book could be made out of sea-island history and tradition: but it is pleasanter to look for wood ibises and egrets on the marshes, to watch the terns and the skimmers and the bluebill fleets along the beaches, and to listen to the wild music of the curlews and the willets while,

. . . . all a mist-streaked, sunny day
The long sea islands lean to hear
A water harp that shallows play
To lull the beaches' fluted ear.

—"Carolina Spring Song," by HERVEY ALLEN.

